Sarah

AND HER DOG DAKIN

MABEL L. ROBINSON

SARAH AND HER DOG DAKIN

BY MABEL L. ROBINSON

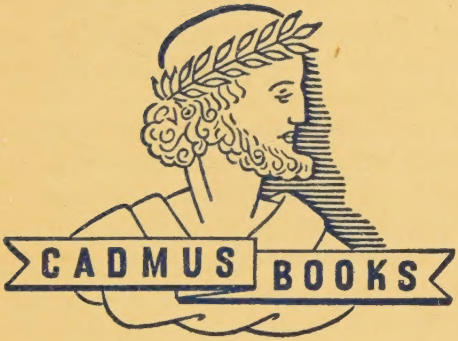
Author of *Little Lucia* and *Little Lucia's School*

Have you ever lost a dog? If you have, then you know how badly Sarah felt when her collie Dakin disappeared one night from his warm cozy bed on the porch. She could not advertise for him because she lived in a small village in Maine where there was no newspaper. Besides, everyone for miles around knew Dakin and would have returned him to his young mistress if he had been seen.

Dakin was very intelligent, as most collies are, but he also could be quite naughty. Try as he would, Sarah simply could not break Dakin of his habit of chasing the seals that used to lie out on the rocks in the sun. It was easy enough for Dakin to chase back into the water any of the brave seals that flopped up on the beach, but to get at those who were sunning themselves on the nearby rocks was quite a problem, even for a smart dog like Dakin.

Then one morning Dakin was gone! His old comforter lay stretched across the porch as if he had leaped out from under it in a great hurry. Sarah ran down to the shore, but there was no sign of Dakin, and her whistle brought no response. Three days, four days went by but Dakin did not return. Sarah had an idea about his disappearance, but she needed money to carry it out. So she worked very hard and earned five dollars. But you would never guess where Sarah went or how she used her hard-earned money to find Dakin again.

* * * * * *


CADMUS BOOKS

SARAH AND HER DOG DAKIN

BY MABEL L. ROBINSON

Author of *Little Lucia* and *Little Lucia's School*

Have you ever lost a dog? If you have, then you know how badly Sarah felt when her collie Dakin disappeared one night from his warm cozy bed on the porch. She could not advertise for him because she lived in a small village in Maine where there was no newspaper. Besides, everyone for miles around knew Dakin and would have returned him to his young mistress if he had been seen.

Dakin was very intelligent, as most collies are, but he also could be quite naughty. Try as he would, Sarah simply could not break Dakin of his habit of chasing the seals that used to lie out on the rocks in the sun. It was easy enough for Dakin to chase back into the water any of the brave seals that flopped up on the beach, but to get at those who were sunning themselves on the nearby rocks was quite a problem, even for a smart dog like Dakin.

Then one morning Dakin was gone! His old comforter lay stretched across the porch as if he had leaped out from under it in a great hurry. Sarah ran down to the shore, but there was no sign of Dakin, and her whistle brought no response. Three days, four days went by but Dakin did not return. Sarah had an idea about his disappearance, but she needed money to carry it out. So she worked very hard and earned five dollars. But you would never guess where Sarah went or how she used her hard-earned money to find Dakin again.

* * * * * *

SARAH AND HER DOG DAKIN

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/sarahherdogdakin0000mabe

SARAH AND HER DOG DAKIN

(FORMERLY SARAH'S DAKIN)

BY

MABEL L. ROBINSON

Author of

"DR. TAM O'SHANTER"

"THE LITTLE LUCIA BOOKS," ETC.

This special edition is published by arrangement with the publisher of the regular edition, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

CADMUS BOOKS

E. M. HALE AND COMPANY

CHICAGO

COPYRIGHT 1927 BY
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

All Rights Reserved

PRINTED IN THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA

TO

MY SISTER MILDRED

For permission to reprint these stories the author's thanks are due to the Editors of *The Portal* and *The Youth's Companion.*

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Sarah's Dakin	3
II.	Dakin Earns His Bones	27
III.	Dakin and the Seals	45
IV.	Dakin Raises Sweet Peas	69
V.	Dakin, The Porch Hound	89
VI.	Dakin's Littlest Pig	117
VII.	Dakin Takes up Missionary Work	135
VIII.	Music Hath Charms	159
IX.	Dakin Sleeps Out	179
X.	A Fair Exchange	201
XI.	Is No Robbery	225
XII.	Keeping the Home Open	253

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
The Snow Storm	26
Seal Cove	44
Dakin's Garden	68
Dakin on Guard	88
Dakin Takes His Pig Home	116
Dakin Trees the Missionary	134
Dakin Sings	158
"Got an Outdoor Sanitarium?"	178
Sarah and Elsa	200
Elsa's Music	224

SARAH AND HER DOG DAKIN

DAKIN'S PRIZE

Chapter I

SARAH'S DAKIN

"DAKIN! Dakin! You walk yourself out from behind that lilac bush!"

The lilac bushes trembled a moment, then a collie's head thrust itself inquiringly toward the kitchen door from which the voice came.

"Now, Dakin!" the peremptory tones became reproachful. "What have I told you about chasing that cat? You walk yourself right up to this step!"

Dakin cast a backward look into the bushes and emerged a few inches at a time until he was clear of shelter. Then he sat down. The girl at the door shook the soap-suds from her fingers and started toward him. Her red head bobbed fiercely at him and her blue green eyes shot sparks. But the dog seemed in no wise alarmed. As she approached, he lifted one dusty paw and presented it to her.

"No!" the stern voice refused. "I won't shake hands with you! I've told you, *You Must Not*

Chase That Cat! What do you mean by such actions?"

Dakin set down one paw and offered the other. His brown eyes met the sparkling ones equably, his mouth opened in a wide panting smile. Sarah capitulated.

"Now, Dakin," she reasoned, pumping his paw up and down, "see if you can't remember to let Bobby's cat alone. Goodness knows it has enough to bother it just being his cat. You ought to be so thankful at what you escaped that you'd mind every word I say."

"Is that so!" came a voice from the porch step, and Sarah and Dakin turned to see Bobby watching them. Sarah's grin vanished. Dakin stiffened.

"Yes, that's so," returned Sarah. "If you hadn't mauled him so when he was a puppy last summer, your mother wouldn't have given him to me. He'd 'a' died if you'd kept him!"

"Huh!" scoffed the boy. "He was no good anyway."

The sparks flew back into Sarah's eyes and hair. She swept the fat boy on the step with a scornful glance.

"No good," she jeered. "P'raps he was no good when you had him. But if there's a handsomer collie now this side of Whiteville, you'll have

to show him to me. Speaking of shows," she gave as a parting shot, "I bet he'd take a prize at any show."

"Sarah!" called a voice from the house. "Sarah! Suppose you finish these dishes and stop quarreling with Robert."

Sarah's clear skin turned scarlet up to her eyes.

"Sorry, Mis' Dakin," she mumbled, dashing back to the sink. "Dakin was chasing your cat." She glanced out under her eyelashes at the gentle-faced, fretful little woman who was trying ineffectively to put the kitchen to rights.

"You just leave things alone, Mis' Dakin," she reassured her. "I'll settle the kitchen into apple-pie order before I go home."

Mrs. Dakin picked up a pair of boy's boots drying under the stove and set them down again.

"All right, Sarah, I wish you would. I've got friends coming in for bridge this afternoon, and Bobby does upset the house so—" her voice trailed after her as she disappeared into the front of the house.

Sarah sighed.

"Poor Mis' Dakin! Between Bobby and her friends she doesn't have a minute's peace. I most wished I hadn't named Dakin after her even if she did give him to me. She lacks—" her mind

strove for the quality which the lady lacked—"she lacks—fishency!" She stepped to the window. "But my goodness, Dakin doesn't."

The dog with a backward glance at the kitchen window had inserted himself into the lilac bushes again, and only his white-tipped plume waving at the cat betrayed his presence. Bobby still sat on the step. "Sic him!" she heard his sly whisper. "Sic him!"

"Miserable little fat worm! Seems sometimes as if there wasn't any good in that boy. Well, there's nothing for me to do but hurry up and get back home with Dakin. Wonder if Mis' Dakin will remember that this is my day to be paid off."

An hour later Sarah, with her dollar and a half week's wages, stepped out of a spotless kitchen into the hot July sunshine. Dakin was stretched in sleepy comfort by the lilac where he could hold the cat imprisoned and take a nap at the same time. Bobby sat on the step watching him. As Sarah whistled and the big dog stretched himself into action, the boy turned small, greedy eyes in her direction.

"So you think your old dog would take a prize, do you, Sadie?" He knew Sarah hated the nickname.

"Yes, I do," flared Sarah, "and if I had time I'd enter him next week at the Fair just to prove it to you. But *I* have work to do—" and she marched righteously down the path.

She turned to see how Bobby took her shot at his laziness, just as the scrawny yellow cat crawled furtively out of the lilac bushes. With an unexpectedly quick motion Bobby reached forward and pulled her tail.

"Bobby Dakin!" Sarah whirled to a stand. "You *let that cat alone!*"

Bobby grinned and disappeared into the house. Sarah turned with an indignant snort to find Dakin, a little puzzled, offering her his ingratiating paw.

"Oh, no, Dakin," Sarah explained, "I wasn't talking to you then. But I'm glad you remember what I said. Yes, you're a good dog." She set his paw down and turned her back to laugh. When her face was sober, the two took up their march again.

"I would enter you, Dakin," she went on talking her thoughts aloud to the dog as usual. "And you would take a prize. Because you'd be the only real collie there. Nothing but shepherd dogs in this county. And that's not the only reason, either," she finished, soothing any hurt feelings.

"You're the handsomest dog in the world and you've got a pedigree and everything."

Dakin wagged an appreciative tail and sniffed at the tin pail of scraps which Sarah was always allowed to carry home for him.

"No, sir! Not till dinner time." Sarah drew one small scrap from the pail. "Except just this to stay your stomach."

Dakin, whose stomach was always stayed at exactly this point, swallowed the offering with a gulp, and they trudged on down the dusty road.

As they entered the weather-beaten little farmhouse, Sarah looked longingly at the rocker on the porch, then at the clock. She rolled up her sleeves again.

"Got to hurry," she pronounced, "or Pa will be in from haying and find no dinner."

But when Pa came in, hot and tired, he found his dinner all ready in the shady, cool dining room, and if Sarah felt hot and tired too, she didn't mention it. Dakin lay under the table, satisfied and asleep after his dinner of scraps. Pa rubbed his foot along the dog's back as he pulled up his chair. "He's a sight of company for you, ain't he?" he remarked.

Sarah nodded. She remembered how terribly empty and lonely the place had felt after her

mother's death. That was when Mrs. Dakin had given her the puppy—she *was* kind! Sarah's keen young face softened.

"Yes, Pa. I don't know what I'd do without him."

The two exchanged wistful smiles. They understood each other perfectly although they never discussed their emotions.

Dinner over, Pa stretched out on the sofa for a minute before his return to the hayfield. His eyes followed Sarah as she deftly piled the dishes, cleared the table, and set the room in order.

"You're right smart for your age, Sarah," he volunteered. Then, encouraged by the glow on her face, " 'Tain't many girls could keep house like this. And wash dishes for rusticators, too." Sarah's shining eyes and bright hair in the darkened room seemed to lighten it like a flame. "Was wondering," he went on, finding enjoyment in her pleasure, "was wondering if you'd like to take in the County Fair next week. Haying will be over."

"Oh, Pa! *Pa!*" Sarah sat down with the pie plate in her lap. "Oh, Pa!"

"Well," he pulled himself up slowly from the sofa. "Well, I guess that's settled then."

But Sarah's mind, which worked even faster

than her fingers, had leaped past Pa and herself going to the Fair and was making rapid arrangements for Dakin.

"Pa, as long as we're going, let's enter Dakin. It's a twenty-five dollar prize, and he'd get it sure. And then we could buy the silo—" her tongue ran on with a dozen details already complete in her head.

Her father pulled on his big haymaker's hat. "All right, go on," he grinned. "But he's your dog and the money'd be yours."

"No, sir!" called Sarah after him. "Ain't I got my dish-pan wages? This goes toward the silo."

Mr. Thurston looked back at the vivid little figure in the dark doorway. "Guess I won't order the silo just yet," he teased.

Next morning Sarah flaunted like a poppy into Bobby's slow vision.

"You'll see," she cried. "He'll get a blue ribbon and not only that," her pause was impressive, for she knew how covetous of cash Bobby was, "not only that, but he'll get twenty-five dollars in good hard money!"

Bobby shifted his gaze from Sarah's triumphant face to Dakin, who was sniffing suspiciously into the lilac bushes. "Huh!" he said thoughtfully and left the kitchen.

Sarah hurried through her dishes, whistling softly under her breath as she planned her letter to the County Fair committee which should apply for Dakin's entry. She finished sweeping the floor and was casting an appraising eye around the neat kitchen when Mrs. Dakin hurried in.

"Sarah!" she cried rather breathlessly. "My husband has just written me that he will make his route through the White Mountains next week. He has to stop at all the big hotels for orders so I always go with him on that trip. I shall leave here on the afternoon boat—" she broke off, looking helplessly at Sarah.

"Yes, Mis' Dakin," reassured Sarah, "and Bobby will stay up at Gilmore's same as always and I'll run up every morning to dust and see that everything's all right."

"Oh, will you, Sarah? Well, then I can go without any worries—" her mouth drooped—"and I do need a change."

"Poor thing," thought Sarah. "Should think she would need a change from that Bobby." Then aloud, "Of course, you needn't worry a bit. I'll see to everything and Bobby likes it at Gilmore's——"

The door slammed and Bobby slumped into the chair by the window.

"Is that so?" he remarked. Then went on casually, "You might as well leave that dog here today. I've got to get him ready."

"You don't say so!" said Sarah. "Ready for what?"

"Ready for the Fair." Bobby was eyeing his mother.

"Thanks," said Sarah dryly. "I guess I can get him ready."

"Well, now, Robert," broke in Mrs. Dakin—Bobby had told her of the prize—"that's very sweet of you to think of helping Sarah out."

"Wasn't helping her out," grunted Bobby. "I'm going to enter the dog myself."

"You don't say so!" repeated Sarah, the dangerous glints running up into her eyes and red hair. "I thought he belonged to me."

"Pooh!" Bobby got up and slouched toward the door. "You may have been boarding him for me but he's my dog."

The scene that followed always made Sarah a little sick to remember. Bobby's bluster, his mother's distracted pleading, his threat to accompany her if she opposed him. At last Mrs. Dakin burst into tears and sank down by the table, hopeless, helpless. Sarah remembered how kind she had always been to her; she felt as if she

were defrauding not only her good friend but a child of a promised treat.

"All right, Mis' Dakin," her voice sounded hard in spite of herself. "Bobby can enter him. You go on your trip. But he's my dog, ain't he, Mis' Dakin?"

"Of course, of course." Mrs. Dakin was quite cheerful again and reabsorbed in her plans.

"And he stays with me till the Fair and comes home as soon as it is over," stipulated Sarah.

"Of course, of course." Mrs. Dakin vanished up the back stairs.

"Guess not," said Bobby. "I got Ed Gilmore to take him over to his place in his car while you were washing dishes." His malicious grin darkened into a threatening frown. "And you keep still about it," he added, "or I'll fix that trip of mother's."

Sarah was white around the lips. She knew that the most Mrs. Dakin could do would be to extract a promise from Bobby to go after the dog. And she knew how much good that would do. She reached for her hat, walked past Bobby, and went off down the dusty road alone.

During the next week, black loneliness wrapped itself more and more closely about Sarah. Days when she had thought that she could not bear it,

she had even started up the road towards Gilmore's, seven miles away. Then she had reminded herself of her promise to Mrs. Dakin and turned back.

Dakin was so much a part of her days. She missed his eager head by her side waiting for the batter left in the cake bowl, she missed his gay escort to the garden when she went after the vegetables for dinner. The walk up to the empty Dakin house each day was a torture. "If only I hadn't talked so foolish about him," she would reflect bitterly, "he would be here now. It's all my fault." She let Pa open the porch door mornings. Dakin's glad rush at her had made the days begin right. And now the porch was quiet and Dakin's rug had no scratched-up corners where he had made his bed.

"Ed Gilmore will see that he is well taken care of," she comforted herself. But she could not get rid of the persistent worry about Dakin's return when the Fair was over. "Bobby can make his mother let him keep Dakin and once he gets a twenty-five dollar prize for him, he will never let him go."

Sarah and Pa talked about it every night after supper while they sat on the porch in the cool of the evening.

"We owe quite a lot to Mrs. Dakin," Pa ruminated, "and yóu were quite right, Sarah, to fix it so she could have her trip." Then he would always come to the optimistic conclusion, "I guess it'll be all right when she gets back."

"I guess it won't," thought Sarah darkly, but she didn't like to worry Pa, so she kept her doubts to herself.

A few days before the Fair, Sarah received a note from Ed Gilmore asking her to mail the record of Dakin's pedigree which Mrs. Dakin had given her with the dog.

"Ed's no idea how Bobby got him away from me," she thought, thrusting the paper into the enclosed envelope. Usually she liked to pore over Dakin's forebears but today her pride in him only hurt her the more. "My soul!" she cried desperately, "it ain't fair a dog should make you feel so bad! And now Pa wants to go to the Fair just the same. I don't know what I'm going to do!"

What she did was to wash and iron her jade green dress which Mrs. Dakin had given her, to tie up her red gold hair with ribbons which matched it, and to appear before Pa the morning of the Fair as fresh as if she had never known a care.

"They'll have a nice time showing Dakin once he gets his eye on me," she thought, taking a certain amount of pleasure from the assurance.

Her prophecy was right. No sooner did Sarah's slim green figure appear in the dog section than a jubilee of barks and yelps arose to the roof.

"He's as lonesome as I am." She swallowed a lump in her throat as she hurried toward the racket.

Bobby stood beside Dakin's bench trying to restrain him. Sarah thought the boy looked a little worried.

"For Pete's sake, Sarah," he cried, "come and make this dog keep quiet for five minutes. He hasn't stopped yelling for a week."

But his command was unnecessary. Dakin had sunk his homesick head into Sarah's shoulder and was whimpering softly like a forlorn baby. Sarah's own jade blue eyes were wet when she lifted her face from his sleek head.

"My, he does look nice!" she thought. "Ed took good care of him!" Comforting, soothing, cajoling, she finally persuaded Dakin to lie down, and with his head resting across her lap as she crouched on a box beside him, the tired dog fell asleep.

"Howls all night," growled Bobby. "No wonder he wants a nap!"

"Guess I'll stay a while with Dakin," said Sarah. "You come back, Pa, when they judge the dogs."

Mr. Thurston frowned thoughtfully at the group.

"All right, Sarah," he said at last. "Say, Bobby, don't you want I should show you the new breed of pigs our county has produced? Great stock, they say."

Bobby looked up, relieved.

"Sure," he agreed, "glad to rest my ears from this racket. But," turning suspiciously to Sarah, "don't you play any tricks with my dog. He's going to be judged in an hour——"

"Now, now," interrupted Mr. Thurston gently, "did you ever know my girl to play mean tricks? She's a pretty good sport, she is," and he smiled down on the shining braids bent over the dog's sleeping head.

Bobby looked a bit uncomfortable. Then, "Oh, well, you know—girls!" and he joined Mr. Thurston as man to man, able and willing to help him judge the merits of pigs.

Left alone with Dakin, Sarah sat up and began to examine the other dogs in the section, a few

Newfoundlands, some shepherd dogs, a good many hunting hounds, and two rather snub-nosed collies. Not much of an assortment, since this was the first year that dogs had been included in the show. Sarah felt warm pride and assurance when she compared Dakin's graceful perfection to the rough-hewn lines of his competitors.

"Though it would be better for us," she whispered, rubbing Dakin's silky ears, "if you never got a prize. Bobby wouldn't want you then." Dakin moaned softly in his sleep.

At eleven o'clock Bobby and her father appeared. As Sarah rose from her cramped position, Dakin sprang to his feet, instantly alert, his eyes on her face. Bobby was singularly ingratiating in his manner.

"Suppose you go out of his sight, Sarah," he suggested. "He'll be all right then."

"Just as you say," Sarah's mouth showed the shadow of a dimple. "Come on, Pa. Let's go out where they're judging them."

"Oh, Mr. Thurston," Bobby called after him, "I'd like to see you again about those Berkshires. You know, I think you are right about that Tamworth breed—" his voice was drowned in a volley of despairing yelps as Dakin watched Sarah disappear.

But Sarah inflexibly never turned an eye. As they reached the ring one of the judges was delivering a speech about his hope that the large prize offered at this show would encourage the countryside to raise good dogs, man's noblest friend, etc. Sarah listened with one ear cocked toward the dog section. She didn't have long to wait. Dakin had found her scent, and Bobby was making a very rapid entry at the end of the leash. The boy's flabby cheeks were red and perspiring as he raced after the dog. Halted beside Sarah, he poured his wrath over her.

"Wouldn't start, he wouldn't, though I nearly pulled his darn neck off. Then when he found where you were, wouldn't stop! Nice kind of training you've given him! Nice kind of entry to make before the judges—" Bobby was glowering alternately at Sarah and at Dakin. Sarah patted the demure Dakin.

"Class One, Collies," called a voice from the ring.

Bobby straightened his collar and picked up the leash. "Come on," he growled. Dakin sat still, his interested eyes on his competitors skulking about the ring. Bobby jerked the leash. Dakin settled himself stolidly back on his haunches.

"Collie entered and owned by Robert Dakin! Ready for judging!" called the voice.

Robert by virtue of his considerable weight succeeded in dragging Dakin, still sitting down, a foot or more.

"Say," he turned with an agonized whisper toward Sarah, who was watching the hounds with a grave interest much like Dakin's. "Say, I can't make myself the laughing-stock of all these hicks. For Pete's sake, lead him in, can't you?"

Sarah accepted the extended leash and under the amused eyes of the crowd walked into the ring. The vivid girl and the great golden dog seemed to take their fancy. Sarah flushed under the applause and passing the leash to Bobby, started quickly back out of the ring. But she had reckoned without Dakin. Though encumbered by Bobby's weight at the end of the leash, he still kept pace with her on her return. The delighted crowd began to call advice to Bobby. Sarah caught a glimpse of his humiliated face and turned swiftly.

"I'll stay with him, Bobby," she called softly to him. "The judge won't mind. And he's your entry."

The judges, who were farmers and a little uncertain as to procedure, eyed the three, and proceeded to go over the points of Dakin. As Sarah

had foreseen, it was almost too easy for the thoroughbred. He had no real competitors. The judges were unanimous and a little overpowered by so much quality. They gathered in a group after all the dogs had been shown, and conferred. At last Farmer Jason who had offered the twenty-five dollar prize came out to make the announcement. This time, in answer to Bobby's pleading gaze, Sarah went forward with him and Dakin at once.

"By unanimous vote," said Mr. Jason pompously, "this prize of twenty-five dollars and the blue ribbon are awarded to the collie before you. But I'd like to know," he added conversationally, "whose dog it is?"

Bobby hesitated. "My entry, Robert Dakin," he informed briefly.

"That's all right," said the farmer curiously, "but how about his pedigree record which gives Sarah Thurston as his owner. You Sarah Thurston?" he glanced at Sarah's burning cheeks with a twinkle in his eye.

She nodded. Sure enough, she had forgotten when she tucked that pedigree record so hastily in the envelope that Mrs. Dakin had, to please and amuse her, filled in her name as Dakin's lawful owner. The crowd craned their necks to hear

what was being said. Bobby drew a long breath. He knew when he was beaten.

"Sure it's her dog," he said in a loud voice. "I just entered him to make it easy for her. Girls can't manage—" his voice was lost in the good-natured laughter of the crowd.

The judge made a courtly bow to Sarah.

"I congratulate you, Miss Thurston, on your excellent dog," he said formally from his speech, "and I take pleasure in presenting you with the award."

Sarah fastened the blue ribbon with fingers which shook a little on Dakin's collar, and with her roll of bills, led Dakin and Bobby back to her father.

"Couldn't we have some ice-cream?" she begged. "I feel as if I'd never get cool again."

"Guess we can," assented Pa, "and you come along too, Bobby."

Bobby hesitated, but the ice-cream parlor offered shelter from all those grinning faces. He followed.

Over their heaped plates—Pa demanded large orders for everybody including Dakin, who had never eaten any before and who didn't know whether his tongue was burnt or frozen—they

felt their way slowly back to where the situation now stood.

"Now about those pigs," began Pa tentatively.

Bobby brightened. "Yes, about those pigs," he agreed. And they entered into a technical discussion of the points of Berkshires.

"My idea," concluded Pa, "would be for you to start with one of that Berkshire litter as a sure thing. A year from now you could exhibit it at the fair, and then, well—" he finished largely, "then you could sell, butcher, or raise more."

Bobby's small eyes were fixed with unwavering interest on Mr. Thurston's face. Sarah looked at her father and caught his twinkle.

"How much is that pig?" she inquired casually.

"Twenty dollars," was Pa's prompt answer, almost as if he expected the question.

Sarah peeled off four new five dollar bills. The silo could wait. Pa wanted Dakin back as much as she did.

"It's really yours anyway, you know," she said, shoving it across the table at Bobby.

Bobby stared greedily at the bills. Then he looked up at Mr. Thurston.

"No, 'tain't," he said gruffly, "but I got ten I saved and if you lend me ten I can get the rest soon."

"No sir!" Pa's voice was hearty and relieved. "I'm interested in this pig and so's Sarah. I'll tell you, we'll go fifty-fifty on this prize and I guess that'll suit everybody. And if you've all got filled up on ice cream, Bobby and I will go pick out the pig while you walk round with Dakin and look at the pretties, Sarah."

Their chairs scraped back from the table. Dakin sprang up, alert, suspicious of Bobby. The boy cleared his throat gruffly.

"Say, Sarah, you take Dakin home with you, will you? I'm sort of fed up on dogs and their everlasting racket. Pigs don't howl!"

"All right, Bobby." Sarah's matter of fact voice gave no evidence of the tumult of joy which Pa saw shining in her eyes. Then as she looked after Bobby paddling along beside Pa's tall lean figure, she smiled maternally.

"Pa's giving him something to do. And my goodness, that's just what he's needed all along. He'll learn a lot from pigs, too," she finished cryptically as with a contented sigh she led Dakin toward the jelly and preserve exhibit.

DAKIN EARNS HIS BONES

Chapter II

DAKIN EARNS HIS BONES

SARAH finished packing Pa's lunch box and her own. Then she put a good-sized bone in a paper bag, twisted the paper firmly, and laid it on Pa's box.

"He can carry that along in his coat pocket for Dakin," she said. "A dog gets pretty hungry out doors all day."

She glanced around her kitchen to see that everything was all right for the day, shut the drafts of the stove, and throwing Pa's coat over her shoulders ran out to the barn to see if he needed any help in the chores.

She slid the barn door back and stood a moment peering into the odorous gloom. Pa had just finished feeding the horses; Dakin was trotting around at his heels, busy and important about the chores.

"Comin'!" called out Pa. "Ain't goin' to be late for school, are you?"

"No," said Sarah, "but if you and Dakin are going to walk along with me, you'd better come. It's eight o'clock."

At the words "going to walk," Dakin forgot the importance of his business in the barn. Out into the snow he dashed, barking his intentions back over his shoulder.

"Now you wait, Dakin," advised Sarah. "Yes, you can go. You needn't be afraid to come back while I get my things on."

But Dakin would run no chances of being shut up for the day in an empty house. He was out waiting by the post-box when Sarah and Pa came down the path. When he saw them really coming, he flung himself into a snow bank, tossed it up on his nose, kicked it into a small blizzard behind him, and then shot off up the road.

"Dakin's like these speed roadsters the summer people have," observed Sarah. "Cut kind of slim and narrow, and awful handsome, and goes like a hurricane!"

Pa laughed. "Just about as useful too," he teased.

Sarah gleamed at him from under her woolly green tam. "Want to start off a day's cutting wood with a snowball down your back?" she asked.

Pa grinned and stared up at the sky. "More snow by night," he prophesied. "And then it'll be just right for hauling out the wood. I'll finish cutting today."

Sarah tramped along beside Pa's big lanky figure. Her cheeks were scarlet with the cold wind from the ocean, her bright hair blew out from under the edge of her tam which made her eyes look greener than the water. Sarah liked the winter, all shut in and cosy, Pa puttering around the house because farm work was light, the long evenings in the warm kitchen with her schoolbooks and with Dakin snoozing beside the stove. And now that Pa had the job of cutting Mrs. Dakin's wood for next summer, they could all walk up the road together every morning.

"Mis' Dakin's a pretty good neighbor to us," remarked Pa, taking up Sarah's thought. "What with this job in a hard winter, and giving you Dakin, and all the things she does in the summer. Guess you ain't sorry you named your puppy after her now, are you?"

"No," said Sarah reflectively, "though I was last summer when Bobby tried to get him away from me. Dakin may not be so very useful, Pa, but I guess he earns his bones. You sure you got that bone in your pocket?"

Pa poked the twisted end of the paper bag out of his pocket.

"Sure," he said. "Well, here we are. Glad I'm goin' up the path behind the school instead of up the path to the door. Ain't you, Dakin, hey?"

Dakin had halted, torn as usual in his desire to stay with both people. Sarah shook a mittened fist at him from the schoolhouse steps.

"You go on, Mister," she commanded, "and don't you come sneaking back here in the middle of the forenoon to disturb everybody the way you did the other day. You stay with Pa!"

Dakin cast a long and yearning look back at Sarah's implacable face. Then recollections of rabbit tracks and frenzied squirrels overtook him, and he dashed up the cart path to a day of unhampered exploration.

Sarah turned slowly into the schoolhouse entry; rows of children's coats, rows of small rubbers. "Wish somebody in this district school ever went further than the fourth grade. Nobody big enough to be any good!" She thought of the big gold and white collie running around up there in the clean-smelling woods, and of the clink of the axe in its snowy silence. The schoolhouse seemed suddenly close and crowded, full of shut-up odors and shut-in noises. Sarah sighed as she pulled off her cap

and tried to smooth down the red-gold wisps of hair. "Oh, well," she said, "tomorrow's Saturday. I'll go up and help haul after I get my baking done."

In the middle of the afternoon Sarah's eyes, travelling out of the window while she waited for slow Sammie Slavin to finish his history topic, discovered that it had already begun to snow.

"Fine like dust," she noted. "That means a lot of snow. Well, p'raps we can't haul after all tomorrow. Never mind, I'll get Pa to make his gingerbread."

Her mouth curled up at the corners as she saw Pa in her mind's eye, fussing around the kitchen, opening the oven every five minutes to stick broom straws into the batter, and finally cutting off the end piece, hot and spicy, and dividing it among the three of them.

"Only Dakin just stands and barks at his piece till it's cool," she grinned to herself.

Then her lips suddenly straightened from their smile. "My goodness, there he is now, barking as if all the rabbits in the woods were headed toward the schoolhouse steps!" She started up in embarrassed haste.

The boys and girls giggled, Miss Bowen frowned. Sarah's face burned. "I'll send him right

back into the woods," she muttered as Miss Bowen nodded her toward the door.

By this time Dakin was up the steps, and when Sarah opened the door, he flung himself in with such impetus that she tipped over against the row of coats.

"Dakin!" she whispered fiercely, "you bad dog! What do you *mean* by disturbing everybody this way! What have I told you!" and irritated and upset, Sarah seized a boy's hockey stick and waved it over him.

Dakin cowered a second, then he burst into another volley of barks. As Sarah, desperate, caught his collar to thrust him out of the door, her fingers closed over the end of a brown paper bag.

"Why, Dakin," she pulled the bag from his collar and stared at it, puzzled. Instantly alarm treaded on the heels of her bewilderment. "Dakin!" she repeated sharply. "How'd that bag get fastened to your collar?" She clutched at the torn wet paper. Sick fear shook her. "Pa's hurt, Pa's hurt," she moaned. "He didn't have a pencil to write anything on the bag but he'd never have sent it if something hadn't happened!"

She wheeled back to the schoolroom, Dakin at her heels, quiet now. Miss Bowen's frown deepened when she saw the dog.

"Let him stay in the entry, Sarah," she began, when she noticed Sarah's face. All the color was drained out of it. "Why, what's the matter?"

"I think my father's hurt up in the woods." Sarah spoke very low to hide the tremble in her voice. "I can't wait a minute. Please, Miss Bowen, have one of the children run over to old Mis' Davis. She's got a telephone. Call up Dr. Macurdy and tell him to come quick——"

"But, Sarah," interrupted Miss Bowen, tired at the end of the day and exasperated by the disorder, "who says he's hurt? Aren't you just jumping at conclusions? The dog was barking around here the other day. Where are you going?"

But her last question had only the children for an audience. Sarah had fled, seizing her coat and cap as she dashed through the entry.

"I'll go, teacher," drawled Sammie. "Sarah don't act crazy for nothin'."

As Sarah ran after Dakin up the path behind the school, her eye fell on the sleds piled up against the wood-house. Stopping an instant, she reached for the rope of a big racer. "Don't know whose it is," she muttered. "I may need it worse than he does."

The snow was falling so fast now that it had already filled up Dakin's tracks. He dashed con-

fidently ahead, however, turning every few minutes to see if Sarah followed him. Sarah was strong and sound of wind and limb, but the snow clogged her steps.

"Wait, Dakin," she finally gasped. "I guess I can't run all the way. Wait!"

Dakin turned reluctantly. He could not stand still. Racing back and forth, he urged her on.

"If I could only go like you!" Then she suddenly remembered calling him a speed roadster that morning. That very morning, and here was Pa who had been teasing her, hurt somewhere in the woods. She broke into a run again.

"It's a mile to the clearing," she reckoned, "and he might have been cutting further in."

When she had begun to feel as if her body was heavy as iron, and that the iron bands of it were the only things which kept her lungs from bursting, Dakin suddenly began to bark. He dashed from the cart path straight into the woods. Sarah followed, picking up the sled which caught in the bushes. The snow was heavy now and the woods were darkening in the short winter afternoon, except for the queer pallor cast back by the snow. Dakin quieted and through the utter silence came a faint, "Hoo, hoo!"

"It's Pa!" Sarah fairly sobbed with relief. "He can still holler anyway!"

Then she saw him, crouched up against a pile of logs covered with snow until he looked almost like a drift. He waved one arm stiffly.

In an instant Sarah was beside him in the snow, brushing him off, hurling frantic questions at him, beating back Dakin's joyous onslaught.

"There, there," soothed Pa. "I ain't so bad off as all that. But I must say I am kind of glad to see you comin'. Cut my leg, Sarah. Sh'd think I might know better after all these years. Cut it kind of bad. Guess I can't walk. Tied it up but lost quite a lot of blood." Sarah shuddered at the stains in the snow. "Guess you'll have to go back and get someone to help me out. Don't like to set it off again." He was speaking in short sentences with a kind of catch in his voice that alarmed Sarah.

She whirled to her feet and dashed back to the bushes where she had dropped her sled.

"Leave you nothing!" she cried. "Now, Pa, if you think I can't drag you down the path a little way, you're much mistaken."

Relief swept over Pa's face when he saw the big racer. "Well, Sarah," he commended, "you sure do use your head."

Sarah was too much absorbed to respond.

"Easy now, easy." She thrust her strong young arms under his, and half lifting, half pulling, got him on to the sled. "I'll go slow, Pa, and you tell me if I hurt. All right?"

Pa nodded and Sarah picked up the rope. Dakin stood close beside Pa. His tail drooped and his eyes looked perplexed and sorry. Sarah peered about her in the pale gloom.

"Which way, Pa?" she asked. "I'm all turned round."

Pa lifted his head from his bent knees. His eyes were bewildered with pain. "Out there's the road I guess," he muttered, and the procession started.

The sled sank into the soft snow until Sarah could hardly move it. But she tugged desperately. "It will be all right as soon as I get out on the cart path," she thought. "I do wish that there was a single big boy at school to have come along with me." She floundered and stopped.

Pa opened his eyes. "Ought to be out on the road by now," he said. "Why, ain't it dark!"

Sarah's heart gave a horrid thud. Suppose this wasn't the way? And Pa with his leg hurt so that he'd die if she didn't get him out to the doctor. Her desperate glance fell on Dakin huddled up close to Pa beside the sled.

"Dakin!" she cried. "Go home!"

Dakin stiffened and looked at her with startled eyes. But he did not move.

"Go home!" she commanded fiercely. "Go on now," and she started toward him threateningly.

Dakin quivered, thrust his nose into Pa's sleeve and whimpered. Pa roused.

"Best let him be, Sarah," he muttered. "He kind o' keeps me warm."

Sarah sobbed. Then she seized a branch from the ground and struck out toward Dakin. He capitulated, turned about in the opposite direction from Sarah's course, and moved slowly through the wood. Sarah caught up the sled rope, and gathering all of her energy, started after him. When Dakin saw her coming, he whirled in delight and raced back to the sled. Again Sarah drove him off; again she followed. Back and forth went Dakin, but now he seemed to understand the need. Sarah no longer threatened, she followed.

Around brush, between tree trunks, how much further could it be? Each time the sled caught in a hollow or stuck on a snow-covered rock it was harder to move. Pa had lost interest now. He sat hunched up on the sled, and Sarah noticed, terror-stricken, how easily he swayed when the sled jerked.

"If he can't hold on, there's nothing I can do. Oh, won't we ever find the path! Maybe this way isn't right either!" Sarah was beginning to know what panic meant.

Then she saw Dakin turn abruptly to the right and stand still, an alert guidepost, marking the entrance to the cart path.

"We're *out*, Pa!" the triumph in her voice roused the dazed man.

"That's good," he murmured, "this ain't what you'd call a real State-road, Sarah."

Sarah felt something stinging hot on her frozen cheek. "Nice time to cry now," she choked scornfully. "If Pa can make a joke, he's all right!"

She slewed the sled gently astride a rut of the cart path, and began her valiant march out. It was easier going now with the gentle down slope of the path and the freedom from hindrances. But Pa was heavy, and a road built for cart horses had little consideration for a girl. Sarah's palms were blistered through her wet mittens, and her shoulder-blades ached for relief.

"If only Miss Bowen let someone telephone for the doctor!" she prayed as she plodded along. "If only it isn't too late——"

Then far ahead of her she heard Dakin's ringing bark. It stopped a moment, then sounded

nearer and nearer. The dark and snow were too thick to see far ahead, and almost before Sarah's blinded stinging eyes saw anyone approach, the sled rope was seized from her fingers and beside her loomed big, burly old Dr. Macurdy. He did not stop for more than a look at the man on the sled, but with a speed which Sarah, even free from her load, could hardly compass, he plunged down the path.

As Sarah pounded on behind the sled, she realized that a small boy was puffing along beside her.

"I got him, Sarah," panted Sammie. "The phone wouldn't work so I ran for him. He fetched me back in his sleigh so's I could show him the way. Is your Pa bad?"

"I don't know, I don't know," Sarah sounded distracted. Then she seemed to comprehend Sammie. "But I'll tell you one thing, Sammie Slavin, I'm obliged to you. Talk about the big boys being more use——"

"Aw shucks!" interrupted the embarrassed Sammie. "Goo'-bye. I take this short cut home," and he scuttled away through a clearing.

In an incredibly short time Dr. Macurdy had Pa bundled up beside him in his little cutter sleigh. He threw a quick look at Sarah.

"Got to have you at the house. Enough for both of us to do," he said. "Just hitch that sled on back and hang on."

Sarah obeyed. Through the stinging snow the sled dashed and bumped behind the sleigh. Beside it, ahead of it, around it, tore Dakin, mad with delight. He had his family together again, out of the woods, on the road toward home. And moreover, they were going at the rate of speed that his temperament demanded.

The doctor stayed until everybody was comfortable. Pa sat propped up in bed, shaky and pale, but devouring a plate of hot baked beans with a good deal of pleasure. Sarah, limp and lame, but so outrageously happy that her hair and eyes shone like flames, settled a huge dish of scraps and a bowl of warm milk before the stove for the attentive Dakin.

"That's quite a dog you got, Thurston," remarked Dr. Macurdy, pulling on his fur gloves. "Just the kind I'd like to take round with me on my calls. Wouldn't care to part with him, would you?"

Pa grinned over his brown pile of beans.

"That's Sarah's Dakin," he announced. "But she was just saying this morning that he wa'nt so very useful. P'raps now——"

Sarah gleamed back at Pa. "Guess he earns his bones, Pa." She piled an extra meaty one on the plate and offered it to Dakin.

Dr. Macurdy chuckled and shut the door.

DAKIN AND THE SEALS

SEAL COVE

Chapter III

DAKIN AND THE SEALS

SARAH stretched out under the thin shade of new pink oak leaves. Spring had come to Maine with such a rush that everything was upset. Here were the wild strawberries ripening and blossoming together. She dangled a cluster of five from her basketful and one by one munched off their fragrant fruit.

She rubbed her knees. "They feel," she said, "as if I had been over the whole pasture on them. And I guess I have." Down by the shore at the edge of the meadow she heard Dakin's bark. "If I could only get him as interested in strawberries as he is in seals," she thought, "he might be some help."

When Sarah had pointed out to Dakin a clump of strawberries with inviting *ohs* and *ahs*, he had obligingly eaten them. He looked a little hurt at Sarah's protest for it was quite apparent that he would never eat strawberries from choice. And as for hunting them out for Sarah to pick, not while

the seals were barking in the cove! Sarah had sat up on her heels and watched him race across the pasture to where the golden ridge of buttercups met the blue edge of the cove. Then he disappeared over the edge of the beach, and Sarah picked on alone. Only the thought of Pa's shortcake kept her from following.

Dakin had been obsessed by the seals this spring. The early warm weather had driven them into the cove and there they sunned themselves by day and screamed at each other in mad games by night. Dakin could not keep away from them. Sarah knew just where she would find him now. She measured the sun's time with an experienced eye, picked up her strawberry basket, and ran through the buttercups almost as lightly as Dakin. The berries were picked, the knees forgotten.

At the bayberry-stiffened edge of the bank she slipped down among the purple beach peas. She chuckled. There lay Dakin, nose on paws, still as a golden statue, his eyes on the shiny wet creatures eased out on the rocks. They were as still as he, and as unaware of him as if he had been a clump of seaweed.

"P'raps he thinks they are dogs," thought Sarah. "They've got dog heads anyway. But he must think their tails are kind of queer."

A dead branch of bayberry snapped under Sarah's weight. Dakin's head came up with a sharp lift. Instantly the seals slipped from their rocks into the water. Dakin plunged down the beach, barking, racing back and forth along the water's edge, even dipping into the icy water in his search for the vanished seals. When they poked their heads up above the surface half a mile away, he burst into a frenzied wail.

"Now, Dakin," Sarah tried to stop laughing because she knew that that would be the last straw for his injured pride, "you might as well stop your hollering and come home with me. I got to make a shortcake for Pa's supper and I can't leave you down here cavorting around after seals all night."

Dakin climbed the bank with many a backward look at the empty blue stage-set where his seals might begin to act again at any minute. But Sarah was unrelenting and home he had to go.

As Sarah sat on the porch in the late June sunshine hulling her strawberries with swift fingers, from far outside the cove she heard the faint roar of the seals. Dakin lifted his head from a sound sleep. "Now, Dakin," Sarah shook a berry-stained finger at him, "you go back to sleep. They're way out beyond Long Island, and you got about as much chance of catching one as if it was an air-

ship." Dakin heaved a long sigh and dropped his head back on his paws.

Later, when Pa, tired after a long day of harrowing, and happy in the aftermath of the shortcake, sat under the kerosene lamp reading his *Farm News*, he poked an accustomed carpet slipper in the direction of Dakin's waiting back. Then he looked over his paper at the unexpected emptiness which greeted his foot.

"Where's Dakin?" he asked.

Sarah's scowl at her English history smoothed into a grin. "Well, Pa," she said, "I expect he's gone seal hunting again. He's just lost his head over those silly seals."

"Lots of 'em around this spring," remarked Pa. "Must have had a good winter."

Sarah yawned, shut up her school books, and went to the door to whistle Dakin in for the night. The moonlight lay still and smooth over the dew-drenched grass. The night was silent except for a shrill hyla or two over the wall in the swamp.

"Peeping frogs most done," Sarah thought regretfully. "I like to hear 'em these quiet nights. Seem sociable."

She moved down the path a way, whistling toward the shore. The seals were quiet. Dakin was quiet. Nothing but the cheep of the frogs.

"Oh, well," she said, "I suppose I got to go after him. I won't bother to go back to tell Pa. It's such a pretty night I'd like to go down to the shore anyway, and he's tired."

She sauntered along, not even whistling now. Dakin might come and then there'd be no excuse for going on down to the shore. She did want to see that path of moonlight across the cove on out to sea. And the seals too. "They might be dog mermaids," she thought. "Dog heads and flipper tails. Bark and play like dogs yet go off under the water. Dakin better look out. A collie dog would feel kind of foolish if a mermaid got him!"

A Peabody bird, startled by Sarah's step, sang out sleepily, "Old man," and then dipped back into the silence. From the cooling earth, the dew soaked out fragrance of strawberries and wet leaf mold. The moon bleached everything, even the buttercups, white. But it streamed through Sarah's red hair and turned it into a nimbus of fine bronze. In the shadow-streaked path, only her bright head marked the progress of her dark little figure.

As she neared the shore, it seemed as if she walked into the cool salt smell of the ocean. It rose up around her, windless, magic. Sarah felt a

curious unaccustomed shiver tingle all over her. The everyday Maine world had vanished into this strange still beauty, this beauty of moonlight and shining ocean. She laughed at herself. "Must be chillier than I thought," she said.

With her usual care in stalking Dakin, she halted at the edge of the stony beach and from behind a great boulder examined the cove. The seals were there, but with the full tide they had gone up further into its shallow dark curve. Sarah slipped along the edge of the shore, her deft step avoiding the crackly driftwood and brush. The moon followed her, and when she stopped at the head of the cove, it streamed across at her in a wide silver path. There in the middle of it rolled and leaped the seals, shining black merdogs intent on their pleasure. Sarah watched them, entranced.

"If I could swim like that," she thought, "how I'd like to play with them! I'd follow them out there until they let me—I would, oh, I would! Leap-frog in the moonlight! Can they see down through the green water to the bottom when they dive? All seaweed and sleeping fishes—oh, I wonder—" she caught herself up with a gesture of dismay—"I guess I'm as crazy as Dakin," she said. "Now, where is that dog?"

And then she saw him, knew him by his long pointed nose and moon-bleached yellow head. He was swimming with his patient dog paddle, not far from shore, back and forth, around and around. The seals beyond him, fear-freed by the night, dove with queer blubbering gulps, rushed past him like high-powered motor boats, teased him; and when Sarah stepped out of the shadow, swam off and left him. Then from the other side of the cove, they broke their silence, roaring across the bay their taunting jeers. Sarah saw poor Dakin turn toward the noise and begin his futile paddle out to sea.

"Dakin, Dakin!" she called. Then followed her clear imperative whistle. "You come here this minute. *Here*, Dakin!"

Dakin hesitated, swung heavily around like a worn-out ferry boat, and paddled slowly toward her. At the edge of the water she met him. All the eerie magic of the night was gone for her. Even the smooth white floor of the water was blurred by a gust of wind out of the south. And Dakin too! Dakin seemed to have waked to his own nonsense. He shook himself over the concerned Sarah, shivered as the wind across the water blew on his wet coat, and walked dejectedly by her side up the beach, across the pasture, into the

house, with never a backward glance toward the laughing seals.

Sarah helped rub him dry with some old burlap bags in the shed. "Just think, Pa," she scolded, "I can't make him go in swimming with me, no matter how hard I coax. And when I have to give him a bath—oh, my!"

Pa chuckled. "Well, he looks as if he'd had enough of it tonight to last him for one spell," he observed. "Didn't know but he'd taken you along too. Was just coming to see."

Dakin did look exhausted. Before Sarah had finished rubbing him, he was asleep. She dragged him out to his bed on the porch and threw his old winter comforter over him. "Still damp," she observed, running her fingers through his thick coat. "But warm as toast." She hugged his sleepy head. "Poor Dakin, did the merdogs most get him? Well, you'll know better next time!"

Toward morning Sarah turned uneasily in her sleep. She thought the seals were marching up to the house on their flippers, a shining wet army roaring for her to come out and bring Dakin, roaring, barking—she woke enough to hear their distant rumble, and fell asleep again.

Next morning Dakin was gone. Absolutely vanished. The old comforter lay sprawled across the

porch as if he had leaped out from under it in a hurry, but of Dakin there was no sign. Sarah hurried Pa's coffee and set his ham and eggs in the oven. "Everything's ready, Pa," she called up the stairs, "you go ahead and eat your breakfast. I'll be back in a minute."

She was back before Pa had poured his coffee. She looked puzzled and cross. "Dakin's not on the shore, Pa," she said, "and I didn't hear or see a sign of him. Now where do you suppose he's gone?"

"Oh, he'll be back for his breakfast before you go to school," said Pa easily. "Gone crazy over a cow or some sheep this time prob'ly. Before I'd have a crazy dog!"

Sarah grinned at him and filled his coffee cup again.

She was almost late to school because she waited so long for Dakin. At last she set his breakfast on the porch, folded up his comforter for an extra soft bed, and ran most of the way up the road to the schoolhouse.

"I'll give him a good talking to when I get back tonight," she promised herself. "Pa's right. He's crazy."

But when she came back after a long dragging day at school, there was no Dakin to talk to. His

breakfast sat by his folded comforter, both untouched. Then Sarah was really worried. Pa almost got no supper, she searched so long and so thoroughly. Nobody had seen him, nobody had heard him—and all the neighbors knew Dakin's deep collie bark. He had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him—or the sea, Sarah thought uneasily as she stared at its rough gray surface. The moonlight night had proved a weather breeder, and the strong southerly wind was fast blowing up a storm.

"Late line-storm, I guess," Pa conjectured. "Nothing's on time this spring. Either too early or too late. Guess this one's been saving up for an extra hard blow."

In spite of the wind and the rain, Sarah haunted the shore. On the third day the sun broke through jagged slits of blue, and the high tide began depositing the débris of the storm along the water's edge. Sarah found herself eyeing with furtive frightened glances the queer-shaped masses of seaweed, yellowish, waving like long hair, half in, half out of the water.

"He'd have come back if he could," she thought. "But he was so tired that night—" She choked and turned her eyes away from the ominous shore line.

By the end of the week Pa had given Dakin up. He tried clumsily to comfort Sarah. "I'll see if I can't get you one of those dogs down at Four Corners," he promised her. "They'll be awful interesting because they'll keep you guessing about what they are. Little bit of ev'rything in them."

But Sarah for once could not rise to Pa's joke. If Dakin was gone, no mongrel pup should take his place. But she would not believe that Dakin was really gone. She thought and thought about it. Only when she remembered the still magic of that moonlight night, the unaccountable eerie shiver caught at her just as it had then.

Pa was sure that Dakin could not have drowned. "Any dog will swim ashore," he asserted. "And even if Dakin was crazy, he was no fool."

"But he was so tired that night," Sarah could not keep the tears out of her voice.

Pa flinched. Sarah never cried. "You better let me get you that hound dog," he advised, and his rough hand rubbed Sarah's bowed red head.

Sarah lifted wet jade-blue eyes. "Guess not, Pa," she smiled at him. "Don't want two dogs round the place," and then she went off to the shore again.

Toward the end of the second week Sarah gave up her search and went back to strawberry picking. School closed on Thursday afternoon for summer vacation. On Friday morning she ran straight to the pasture and picked until supper time. On Saturday she was at it again before breakfast and except for time spent in getting Pa's meals, she picked the tiny berries all day. Pa helped her to hull them evenings. In his relief at not seeing that haunted little wind-blown figure trailing up and down the shore, he would have counted them for her if necessary.

He eyed the great mixing-bowl full. "Well, Sarah," he said, "that's about the biggest mess of wild strawberries I ever knew anybody to have the patience to pick. Aimin' to do anything special with 'em?"

Sarah was busy at the stove. "Jam," she said briefly.

"My, my, wild strawberry jam! Well, ain't we goin' to have a feast!"

Sarah dumped the sweet smelling berries into her largest preserve kettle. "No, Pa, we ain't," she said firmly. "I get five dollars for these. Mis' Dakin told me last summer that she'd give me five dollars. But I told her that I wouldn't pick that many for any money. Felt kind of mean too, when

she gave me Dakin, and he named after her and all."

Pa couldn't resist it. "Kind of memorial jam?" he twinkled. Then he gulped frantically. Too late, the joke was out. He watched Sarah's back. Sarah tossed a fleeting grin over her shoulder. Pa heaved a great sigh of relief.

"Got my money in advance, too," Sarah ignored his question. "Wrote her last week and got the check today."

"Well, I don't know as I'd 'a' done that," Pa looked grave. "We Thurstons don't do business that way."

Sarah's ladle poised over the kettle, quivered. "Pa, I *had* to." She turned desperate eyes on him. "I'm going to give her an extra pint for interest. I couldn't wait till she came next month. It'd be too late."

Pa was silent. Sarah's back was toward him again, but he could see her free hand rub her cheek in a touching childlike gesture.

"It's all right, my girl," his voice had hearty reassurance. "There don't seem to be an awful risk in trustin' you." He picked up his paper, and the kitchen steeped silently in the fragrance of the cooking fruit.

On Sunday afternoon when the dishes were

washed and Pa was snoozing gently in the hammock, Sarah disappeared down the road. About dark she came back, dusty and draggled, but with a triumphant look in her eye. Pa was muddling around the kitchen in a clumsy attempt to collect a Sunday night supper. Sarah took the milk bottle from his hands and motioned him to his chair at the table. In a few minutes her deft fingers had set before him cold meat, bread, preserves. "I couldn't find any of those things." Pa shook his head at the pink slice of ham.

Sarah sat opposite him and ate hungrily. Some great depression which had sapped her appetite seemed at least temporarily lifted.

"Pa," she said at last, "think you could get along tomorrow with a cold dinner like this? I'll be back in time to get something hot for supper."

"Sure," said Pa. "Tastes good to me. Goin' off somewhere to spend that five dollars?"

Sarah finished her glass of milk. "Yes," she nodded, "I am."

Pa asked no more questions. Sarah shot him a glance of gratitude. "He senses that it's something to do with Dakin. And he's sure Dakin is dead. Yet he wouldn't stop me," she thought. She made a salad of apple and walnut meats with brook

cress which Pa liked specially, and set it away for him tomorrow.

At sun-up Sarah was off. The clean freshness of the Maine summer morning washed away any misgivings. She ran down the dew-wet path to the shore. Blue, blue water with long golden sunrays coming over Mount Desert. She listened.

"Be quiet, birds," she cried. "You make such a racket that I can't hear—oh, there he comes!" The *put-put-put*, of a motor boat barked through the morning music of the birds. Around the point of the cove chugged a little power boat. It slid expertly up to the broken-down end of a wharf where Sarah stood, and then *put-put-put;* it was off down the bay with her aboard.

Sarah pulled at her hat to shade her eyes and stared off into the glare of the sun. "Straight across first," she commanded, "to Little Sheep Island."

The man at the wheel grunted. "What yer goin' there for? Ain't nothin' to go to Little Sheep for save sand."

Sarah looked at him thoughtfully. "Little Sheep *would* be southeast, wouldn't it, Mr. Groot?"

Old Groot glanced at the compass. "Straight," he snapped. "What's that got to do with it?"

Sarah shut her lips together and sat down in the bow of the boat. Off on a motor boat, dashing through the blue water at the top of a summer morning, yet Sarah sat tight-lipped and stern, watching the nearing shore of the island.

"Have to take you off in the dinghy," grumbled old Groot. "Bad shore here."

He rowed her ashore and sat disapprovingly erect on the stern seat sucking at his pipe while she was gone. Sarah returned in about half an hour. She still had under her arm a lumpy bundle which she had carried carefully ever since they had left.

"Been gone long enough to cross the island," Groot shoved the dinghy clear.

"I did," admitted Sarah briefly.

On board the *Isabel*, he pulled up anchor and rolled the wheel over. "Wal?" he asked.

"Moose Island. That's sou' sou'west, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is. Goin' to box the compass fer yer five dollars?"

Sarah opened her lips and shut them again.

Moose Island was even smaller than Sheep. Sarah returned to the dinghy, looking dejected and suddenly tired. She laid her bundle beside her in the boat.

"Now just over there to Long Island, please,"

she asked. "I'll be there a long time, Mr. Groot, because it's a big island so p'raps——"

"Say, what you think?" interrupted Groot. "Think I'm goin' to hang round here all day and wait for you to skite all over the earth!"

Sarah swallowed. "Now see here, Mr. Groot," and if her heart failed her, he didn't know it. "You can't earn five dollars a day working anywhere around here. I got the five dollars. You get it when the day is over." She looked away from his black scowl. "What I started to say was, why don't you go pull your lobster traps for a couple of hours or so and then come back after me this afternoon?"

Groot grunted. "Some sense to that," he admitted, and swung the dinghy ashore. He looked curiously after the little figure hugging its bundle as it disappeared down the island wood-road.

Sarah heard the *put-put-put* of his boat as he made off for his lobster pots and knew that she was alone on the big island.

"It's three miles long," she reckoned, "but not very wide. If it wasn't for the woods, I think maybe you could hear across it. But they're pretty thick."

She sighed and trudged down the old island path. Now and then she passed a deserted broken-

down house. Here even a schoolhouse. She looked at it curiously. "Seems queer," she thought, "that enough quarry people used to live on Long Island for them to have a school. Too bad the granite gave out."

As she walked, she whistled. She had whistled so loud and so long that she felt all empty inside like a pricked balloon. Her hopes felt pricked, too.

"This is the last chance," she said. "There's no other island in this group, and that southerly wind couldn't have blown him any other way."

Silent and deserted the island remained its whole length. The road ended on a little hill at the north end. Sarah looked behind at the thick spruce growth she had traversed.

"I'll go back along the wind'ard shore," she decided. "Maybe he would have stayed down close to the water hoping we'd come get him." Her chin trembled but she clutched her bundle and slid down the steep cliff to the shore.

It was hard work climbing over the rough stones when she was so tired. The tide was high and sometimes she had to scramble up the sandy banks to get around inlets. Slowly, slowly, she worked her way back. She had less and less breath

to whistle. She began to call, "Dakin! Dakin! You come here, Dakin!"

As she neared the end of the island she heard, from the other side, the faint *put-put-put* of the returning *Isabel*. She flung herself down on the beach. Exhaustion and hunger and despair had got her at last.

"I can't go back without him! I can't go back," she moaned. She lay there motionless in the sun trying to push back the realization that at last she must admit Dakin was really gone. She pulled herself up. "I feel as if I could just about drag myself around the point to the boat," she thought.

But the short rest had given her whistle fresh impetus. She left the beach and crossed the end of the island behind an old fisherman's shack, whistling a final imperative call.

And then Dakin came. Out through the glassless window of the shack in one great leap straight into Sarah's arms. Sarah, exhausted with hunger and weariness, fell back under his onslaught into the long, scratchy beach grass. Dakin was beside himself. He nosed at her face, sprang back and sent a paean of barking to the skies, fell upon her again and shook at her sleeve. Sarah tried to seize him around the neck but he leaped about her like a yellow zigzag of lightning.

"All right for you!" Sarah was half hysterical now. The sudden fulfilment of her hopes was almost too much for her. "Even if you won't stop for me to hug you, I bet you'll stop for this."

She reached for the bundle which had rolled away at her feet and pulled at the strings while she pushed back Dakin's head with her elbow.

"There, sir! Now *eat!*" And Dakin did, in great starving gulps which took no note of the kind, only the quantity of the food. Sarah had a chance to look at him now. Her Dakin, scrawny, burr-matted, wolfish in his tearing at the food she had brought him! Poor Dakin! He was no hunter, and rabbits were scarce on the island. She drew a sandwich out of her pocket and ate it gratefully. Around the end of the island she could hear old Groot honking his fog-horn for her. She grinned beatifically. When Dakin had finished the last scrap and was preparing another ecstatic frenzy of rejoicing, she sprang up and together they raced across the point. Sarah stopped only to peer an instant in the window of the hut and shudder at the place where Dakin had found shelter. Dakin refused to approach the shack again.

When he got to the shore, he refused also to go

down to the water's edge. Groot was waiting with his dinghy, amazed eyes on Sarah's find.

"Wal, if that don't beat all!" he said. "How in heck did you know that dog was over here?"

"Just sense," Sarah explained blithely. She perched on the tilted bow of the dinghy and waited for Dakin to overcome his new-found aversion to the water. "Wind came up strong southerly the night he was lost."

"But he wasn't a boat workin' loose from the moorings. He was a dry-land dog." The man looked as if he could not believe the evidence of his eyes.

"Not always, he wasn't." Sarah chuckled. She pulled the reluctant and shivering Dakin aboard the dinghy as he inevitably approached her on its edge. "Not always!" From away across the bay came the faint roar of the seals at play in the cove. Dakin cowered, trembling, on the floor of the boat. "But I think it's pretty sure he means to be a dry-land dog now. And I guess it would take quite a lot of persuasion to change his plans!"

DAKIN RAISES SWEET PEAS

Chapter IV

DAKIN RAISES SWEET PEAS

DAKIN had watched Sarah solemnly while she planted her sweet peas. Anything in the way of digging interested him and roused his ambition. While Sarah was working at one end of the trench, he began at the other, and before she discovered him, he had dug a hole large enough to plant a small tree.

"Now, Dakin," expostulated Sarah as she turned and saw the dirt flying under his rapid paws, "you quit that right off. I don't want you getting the habit of digging round here. Besides, look at you! You're a sight!"

Dakin shook himself and marched off, a disgruntled and very dirty collie. But before long he was back, nose close to Sarah's hands while he tried to sniff out the reason for her excavation.

"No, Dakin," explained Sarah, "there's no mole down here and no field mouse. There's nothing at all but what I put in—" she showed him a seed and popped it into the loamy earth—"and

what I put in, I want left in. Do you understand?"

Dakin sat down on his haunches and looked bored. But when Sarah came back to finish planting the next day, the place looked as if a harrow had been dragged through it. Dakin was nowhere to be seen.

"Now he knows better than that," decided Sarah. "He's got to be spanked."

When she found him, innocent eyed, behind the parlor lounge, she dragged him out and showed him the devastation. He looked surprised at first, but Dakin was pretty straightforward in his mischief, and he took his spanking with a good enough grace.

Sarah retrieved the uprooted seeds and stuck them into the ground again while Dakin watched.

"Now don't you touch those seeds again," she said firmly to him. And Dakin let them alone.

"It's no use to drive him out of the garden or to tie him up," Sarah told Pa wisely. "He'd only wait his chance. Now he knows what I expect of him."

"P'raps," agreed Pa doubtfully. "But his idea of raising sweet peas may be some diff'rent from yours. He'd get 'em up quicker, anyway."

Sarah grinned.

"Might be," she said. "But he's smarter than you think."

Sarah had tried a small patch of sweet peas the preceding year, and their beauty and fragrance had filled her with amazement.

"I didn't know flowers could be like that," she had said, fingering their silken loveliness. "Next year I shall have a whole garden full. And I hope the rusticators up to the boarding house will let me alone about them. The way they pestered me last summer to buy my flowers! They think the natives will sell them anything."

Sarah had saved her seeds, and even bought some special varieties this year from a famous seed house. She had followed directions explicitly, though some of her order had been upset by Dakin's assistance. Now, except for the slightly irregular arrangement which his planting took on, the rows of thrifty plants climbed steadily up their trellises. The whole garden had taken on a kind of midsummer madness of color in the heat; glowing nasturtiums sprawling about the rocky edges, freckled fox-glove as tall as Sarah nodding delicate lavender bells, poppies in blazing patches, only the sweet peas still green and budded in their cool, straight lines. They were nearly ready to blossom when Dakin rediscovered them.

The days had grown very hot for Maine, so hot that Sarah hated to see Pa go off with his scythe over his shoulder in the blazing July sunshine. So hot that the locusts sang all day and the little brook at the end of the pasture dried up.

"I s'pose you have to hay while haying's good," thought Sarah, as she drew a bucket of icy water and mixed a pitcher of lemonade. "But it's awful hard on the farmers."

She put on her big peanut-straw hat and started for the upland meadow where Pa was haying just then.

"Want to come, Dakin?" she called. "No, I guess he'd better not. It's too hot. If he doesn't hear me slam the door, he won't know I've gone."

She shut the screen door softly and crossed the long garden slowly, looking down at the border of candytuft and sweet alyssum with a critical eye for their progress.

"They don't mind the heat so much," she thought. "They're tough little plants. But I'm glad I followed the directions and put my sweet peas where it was shady part of the day."

It was just then that she discovered Dakin. He too had found the location of the sweet peas pleasant. And he had hollowed out the earth which

Sarah's nightly watering had kept cool and damp until it had fitted his big, warm body. There he lay, the green vines fluttering gently over his sleeping head.

Sarah's angry cry awoke him.

"Dakin Thurston! You've ruined those plants! Their roots are all uncovered. Get right up, you bad dog!"

Sarah's concern over her flowers was so great that she scarcely noticed the queer skulking way that Dakin slipped into the barn and hid himself. She hastily scooped the earth back over the exposed roots and pressed it into place. Then she picked up her pail of lemonade.

"You just wait till I carry this up to Pa," she called into the barn door, "and I'll settle with you. Bad dog!" Not a sound greeted her from the sweet-smelling depths of the big barn. "Funny," she thought, "he usually tells me right off that he's sorry."

But Dakin told her neither then nor later when she found him in the wheat bin and dragged him out to the seat of his crime. Instead, to her unspeakable amazement, he growled at her. She sank down on the ground beside him and stared at him with horror-struck eyes.

"Did you really growl at me, Dakin? Why,

you couldn't! You never did such a thing in your life!"

Dakin would not look at her, and as soon as she released his collar, he skulked back into the barn.

Sarah sat on the ground hugging her knees.

"He couldn't have meant it," she said aloud to the sweet peas over her head. "I ought to know if anyone does with my red hair and temper how easy it is to say things you don't mean. And it was too bad," she repented, "to drag him out of the only cool spot he could find and then to scold him. P'raps I only imagined he growled."

But as she went into the house to get dinner for Pa, she looked worried.

"Well," asked Pa, splashing cool water over his face at the kitchen sink, "did Dakin find out what you expected of him this time?"

Sarah wished that she hadn't sputtered so about him when she carried up the lemonade.

"I guess so, Pa," she answered vaguely. "I got you cold meat and potato salad. Didn't seem right to eat hot food on such a day."

"You're a good housekeeper," commended Pa. "It ain't right." He eyed her sharply. "And you better be kinda careful what you give Dakin these hot days. Too much food's not good for him."

"Why, Pa?" inquired Sarah eagerly. "Would it make him cross?"

Pa helped himself from the mound of creamy-looking potato salad.

"Might," he said.

Sarah's eagerness suddenly evaporated.

"Anyway, he's not eating much of anything," she sliced a piece of corned beef thoughtfully. "He never touched his breakfast."

"We'll get showers by this afternoon," prophesied Pa. "Then it'll be cooler and we'll all feel better."

Pa was right. Great thunder-heads rolled up about four o'clock, muttering and rumbling among themselves. Sarah saw Pa driving a last load of hay down from the meadow before the storm broke. She hurried out to help him and heard him call out as he slid down from his load in the barn, "Move on, Dakin. I got to pitch hay right there." He made a playful feint at the dog with his pitchfork, then suddenly set it end-down on the floor and leaned on it, staring at Dakin. Sarah knew with sick assurance that the collie had growled at Pa, too.

When the storm broke and the two hurried into the house, Dakin stayed behind. Dakin, who was so terrified at a thunder-storm that the least rum-

ble brought him close to her side. Dakin stayed out all alone in the barn while the worst storm of the season crashed about him.

Sarah went uneasily from window to window. Pa watched her while he pretended to read the paper which the darkness had made illegible.

"Thought you liked thunder-storms," he remarked finally. "What's the matter, Sarah?"

Sarah faced him desperately.

"He growled at me, too, Pa."

"I thought he might of," said Pa, gently. "Guess it's the hot weather. He'll be all right tomorrow."

But Dakin wasn't. Though the air was washed clean of heat and the wind blew out of the north with sharp vigor until the sea was ruffled blue and white, none of the brightness seemed to penetrate Dakin. Three times Sarah persuaded him cautiously out of the sweet pea patch. Finally he crawled into a dark corner of the barn, refusing food and ignoring all of Sarah's attentions.

And then the worst happened. His old enemy, Bobby Dakin, happened in the barn to borrow one of Pa's old troughs for his new litter of pigs. Dakin knew what to expect from Bobby and usually kept out of the way. Now he lay on his pile of hay and watched the fat boy with sullen

eyes. When he saw Bobby about to remove property which obviously did not belong to him, he rose and blocked the way out of the barn.

Bobby, who, except for pigs, had profound ignorance and arrogance in regard to animals, aimed a kick at the dog. Dakin instantly grabbed the heavy wool sock with his teeth and ripped it from knee to ankle. Bobby howled and ran.

When Sarah, white and stricken, reached him, he was nursing his leg and demanding a gun.

"If I don't shoot that cur!" he screamed. "He's mad! I'll get hydrophobia! Oh, gosh, I'll die! I'll die!"

Sarah fought back his fat hands with one arm and yanked down the torn sock with her free hand. Bobby's leg was as smooth and unblemished as a baby's. He glared at it in amazement.

"Now be quiet!" commanded Sarah. "You're more scared than hurt. A great boy like you yelling like that!"

Sarah's scorn was the last acute touch. Bobby turned furiously on her.

"All right for you! We'll see! Keep a mad dog, will you? I'm going to telephone the sheriff and you'll have a dead dog before night." He lumbered down the path with considerable velocity

for him. "You wait! We'll see!" Sarah could hear him calling back as he fled.

When Sarah turned into the barn she was trembling quite unmanageably. She sat down on a box and stared at the dog. Then she got his collar and leash and fastened him to a staple. She noticed with terror that his mouth seemed to drool and she brought him a pan of cold water. He plunged his nose into it and drank eagerly. She turned and left him in the barn, got her hat, and started up the road toward Bobby's house.

When Pa met her coming into the yard an hour later, he was shocked at her drawn face.

"What's the matter, Sarah?" He shook her shoulder sharply.

Sarah stared at him a moment, her face working. Then the storm broke. From Pa's shoulder came her broken, incoherent cries.

"They're going to kill him, Pa, my Dakin. The sheriff's coming tonight. I begged Mis' Dakin—and begged her! How she gave him to me and how he's named after her! And anyway Bobby kicked him."

Pa drew her down on a grassy hummock beside him and pulled off her hat. He smoothed the rumpled red hair and patted the shaking shoulders.

"What she say, Sarah?" he asked in his gentle voice.

"She was crazy scared because he'd snapped at her precious Bobby. Said collies were treach'rous anyway. And she'd never have another minute's peace with him in the neighborhood thinking he's mad. Oh, Pa!" she sobbed wildly, "don't let the sheriff come! *Don't* let the sheriff come!"

Pa looked considerably shaken himself.

"O' course, Sarah, we can't keep a mad dog or even a dangerous one. I declare, I don't know what to do!"

Then Sarah felt him straighten up.

"Sorry, Miss Judd. Sarah's feelin' kind of upset about Dakin. Was there anything you wanted?" he inquired courteously.

Sarah raised streaming eyes. All her pride was shattered. Miss Judd was kind. She was the nicest rusticator who came to the boarding house. The motherly, concerned face bending over her brought out her sobbing confidence.

"Well, now." Miss Judd straightened up. "I'd just screwed up my courage to come to see if you'd sell me some flowers for a tea I'm giving, but I guess we'll look at the dog first. I'm not afraid," she reassured them, quickly, "I've had collies all my life. Let's see him."

They went into the barn, Sarah's fingers clinging to Pa and to Miss Judd. She was suddenly just a little girl again. When she saw that Dakin's pan was empty, however, she broke away from them and filled it. He drank, greedily.

"Mad, nothing!" was Miss Judd's caustic comment. "It's usually the people who are mad, not the dog. Sick, yes. Ought to get him to a veterinary."

"How can I get one? Quick! Where can I find one?" Sarah's tears dried on her blazing cheeks. Oh, was there a chance for Dakin, even now?

Miss Judd shook her head.

"I'm afraid the nearest veterinary is in Bangor," she said.

Sarah's brain worked like lightning. She was her competent self again. If Dakin had a chance, it shouldn't be her fault if he missed it.

"Got to get him there today, before the sheriff comes." Her voice was clipped and clear. "Auto stage goes by at one o'clock. Three hours to Bangor." She caught Pa's troubled look and faltered. "I know it will cost an awful lot, Pa." Her eyes had a desperate withdrawn look. She must manage now, there must be some way.

"I know!" She seized Miss Judd's hand and

dragged her over to the sweet pea bed. "See, Miss Judd, millions of them, and such beauties! You'll see! *Don't* you think the boarders would buy 'em?"

"Well, you just try them, Sarah Thurston." The warmth of Miss Judd's voice reassured Pa's pride. "They've been just crazy to buy your flowers all summer but they didn't dare ask."

Sarah giggled hysterically.

"My red hair," she explained. "Scared 'em," Then she darted into the house.

The one o'clock stage bore, in addition to various trunks and ginger-pop boxes, an immaculate Sarah, tense and watchful, and a subdued, indifferent Dakin, well leashed and guarded. Sarah sat on a box of bottles in the back of the truck with him, though the jovial driver, unaware of any trouble, urged her to leave him and come up on a comfortable seat.

"Just speed up past the Dakin house, would you, please?" she asked. "I don't want Bobby to see me."

The truck driver, who bore no love to Bobby from a certain tire-puncturing device of his, willingly stepped on the gas. Sarah caught a glimpse of Bobby bending over his pigpen, and crouched down near Dakin. Bobby straightened

at the sound of the truck, but it was too far past for him to be sure of the passengers.

About nine in the evening she came back. Pa heard the night stage stop down at the end of the path and by the time Sarah was out of the truck, he had half reached the road. In the dark he saw her wearily trudging up the path, alone.

"Sarah," he called sharply, "what happened?"

Sarah broke into a little skipping run when she saw him.

"Oh, Pa! Pa!" she cried. She put her arms as far around him as she could reach and squeezed hard. "*What* do you think Dakin had? *Canker!* Great awful patches all over the inside of his mouth and throat! And just think how one little speck of it hurts!"

"But where is he?" inquired Pa. "You don't sound as if the canker had carried him off."

"Pa!" Sarah shook at his waist-line. "I should say not. The vet—he was an awful nice man—thought I'd better leave him for a few days while he doctored him up. My, but Dakin hated to have me go!"

"But, Sarah," Pa sounded a little worried—"couldn't I have done it?"

"No, it had got too bad. I asked him. But it's all right, Pa. I told him that I'd pay him some on

account each week as fast as I sold my flowers. He just laughed and said he guessed it wouldn't take many weeks. And anyway, I don't care," she finished valiantly. "I'm going to peddle my sweet peas up there to the boarding house till those boarders will wish they'd never mentioned 'em. I got my Dakin—" she broke off short—"Pa, did the sheriff come?"

"He did." Pa chuckled. "With a gun big enough to shoot an elephant." Sarah shuddered. "I kinda joshed him and we had a real good time. He's just gone," and again Pa gave a reminiscent chuckle.

Sarah breathed a relieved sigh, and attacked voraciously the supper Pa had set out for her.

"I'll see Mis' Dakin first thing in the morning," she promised. "And you wait till I tell Bobby what that vet said about cowards who wanted to shoot a dog the minute he scared them a little! He said any man with half that trouble in his mouth would have done more than growl, specially if he got kicked at. He most frothed at the mouth himself he got so mad at people the crazy way they treat sick dogs. And so did I!" Sarah grinned up at Pa over a huge sandwich. "We had a real good time, too."

When Dakin came back at the end of three days he had his old jaunty swagger. After his flying leap from the truck to Sarah, and his minute and careful examination of the place to see that nothing had changed during his absence, he resumed his gay interest in life. But he rarely let Sarah out of his sight; without at least knowing that she was safe in the kitchen. Never once did he disturb the sweet pea bed.

Curiously enough the vines whose roots he had kept stirred up, were the first to bloom. The day after Dakin's return, Sarah gathered a great market basket of her most gorgeous blossoms to take up to the boarding house. Dakin watched her. At the edge of the sweet pea patch he withdrew as if the place had unpleasant associations.

Sarah looked her first pea blossoms over lovingly. Great four-clustered, fragrant heads. Couldn't she leave these for herself? Then she saw Dakin watching her, Dakin, all well now and good as gold!

"I know," she cried aloud, and Dakin leaped to his feet.

With her scissors she snipped off the long stems. Then she ran into the house and came out with a funny little basket which had been used for wax flowers years ago. Carefully she lined the basket

with wet paper and filled it to overflowing with silky blue and orange and creamy blossoms.

Then she turned casually to Dakin. "Want to carry this for me?" she asked, just as she invited him to carry the newspaper from the mail-box each day. Dakin wagged assent.

"Will you be very careful and walk slow?"

Dakin would. So off they started.

"It's funny I don't mind so much going myself as long as he's in the business too." She grinned down at his demure head balancing the wagging basket.

"Now, Dakin," Sarah drew a long breath and entered the boarding house driveway. "Remember your basket is for Miss Judd and no one else is to have it."

It is doubtful if Dakin would have made such an extraordinary example of intelligence and obedience if Miss Judd hadn't happened to be the only person sitting on the porch.

She rose with a cry of delight. "Sarah, you're like a poppy yourself, and Dakin a big chrysanthemum!"

Dakin heard his name and walked gravely up to the speaker.

"They're for you, Miss Judd, the first ones," explained Sarah, shyly. "Dakin helped raise 'em

—and—and—" she stumbled a little, "he may not know it, but I guess he wouldn't be here if it hadn't been for you." Sarah's jade-blue eyes were misty.

"Well, well." Miss Judd bent down and took the basket. Dakin gave his head a relieved shake. She held the flowers up and sniffed at them. "Well, Sarah, these are the loveliest sweet peas I've ever seen. Thank you, Dakin, thank you—" but Dakin had whisked around the corner of the house after a cat.

Miss Judd opened the hall door.

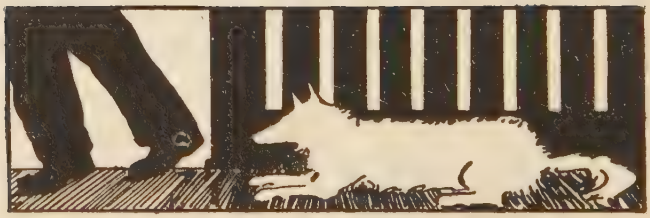
"Come out, all you folks," she cried. "The flower market is open!"

Sarah settled down on the porch with a businesslike air. It was rather nice after all to hear those rusticators admire her flowers. And she'd had the fun of picking them and arranging them. And then there was Dakin.

"I'll soon get Dakin out of debt at this rate," she thought, tucking another quarter into her box. "But I hope I don't have to pay for a new cat while I'm earning it."

DAKIN THE PORCH HOUND

DAKIN ON
GUARD



Chapter V

DAKIN, THE PORCH HOUND

SARAH hired him. For days she had been worrying because Pa had no one to help him with the hay. "They all got to get their own hay in," Pa told her. "Not a man to be had within ten miles." But this man had come from far outside a radius of ten miles. Sarah was used to sunburn and tan, but she knew that the swarthy face was the product of no Maine sunshine. Sarah was not disposed to consider complexions, however, when the man asked for work. She opened the screen door wide. "Plenty of it," she promised. "Can you cut hay?"

"Cutta the hay?" The man considered. Then, "Sure, cutta the hay!" He looked about the spotless kitchen. "Cuppa coffee?" he suggested.

Sarah flew to the cupboard. In her zeal for Pa, she felt that she had overlooked hospitality. She set before the man cold meat and bread and pie with his coffee and marvelled at his disposal of

it. "Poor thing," she thought. "I guess he had his last square meal in Italy."

"From Italy?" she raised her voice, hoping to make him understand her language.

The man showed all his white teeth. "New York," he said.

"Oh!" Sarah felt distinctly flattened. "What is your name?" She spoke in her ordinary tones.

"Giovanni."

Sarah brightened. "Giovanni" did not sound like New York. But on the other hand, it was hard to say. She attempted it when she introduced him to Pa up in the hayfield. Pa looked her candidate over.

"Well, Johnnie—" Sarah noticed that he raised his voice, too—"I'm sure glad to see another man in this hayfield. Here's your scythe," and he delivered over the extra scythe which Sarah had taken the precaution to bring along.

"Johnnie's from New York," whispered Sarah as she walked past Pa on her way back to the house.

"Is that so?" Pa looked doubtful. "There ain't much hay cutting done in New York as far as I know."

The man's white teeth flashed reassurance at

them. "Sure, cutta the hay," and he slashed a wide swath.

"My, an Italian's got good hearing," murmured Sarah, moving on.

It wasn't until noon that Dakin met Johnnie. The collie had been off somewhere for the forenoon on his own affairs. When Sarah was busy in the kitchen and Pa was in the hayfield where Dakin was forbidden on account of the scythe, the dog frequently called on Billy, the Airedale, a summer visitor up the road. Sarah looked at him now as he drank thirstily from his dish on the porch.

"You and Billy been chasing gulls on the clam flats again," she said severely. "Well, you stay out of my clean kitchen. I'll bring you your dinner on the porch."

Dakin looked a little sheepish and sat down around the shady corner to wait for his dinner. Suddenly Sarah heard him roar, and caught a glimpse of him tearing past the window.

"Mercy! What's the matter with him now?" With her platter of boiled dinner in both hands, she rushed toward the door. Swish! it flew open and in an instant Johnnie, the boiled dinner, and Dakin were all on the kitchen floor. Sarah never knew how she stayed erect.

Another minute, and Dakin was out on the porch having a conference with Pa. Sarah wished that he'd hurry. Johnnie was fairly jabbering with fright. "That bad dog!" she muttered. "Johnnie and the boiled dinner spoiled!" She speared the corned beef from under a chair and shaved off the surface on which it had slid. "Dakin will have to eat those vegetables though goodness knows he doesn't deserve them. And all the men can have is the second helping in the pot. But, anyway, Johnnie couldn't possibly eat another meal so soon."

But Johnnie could. Fear had no effect on his appetite. Sarah viewed the empty dishes with alarm. "And it's only because they are empty that he stopped," she realized. "My! My! How can I ever cook enough for him? But, anyway, he's going to help Pa."

After dinner Johnnie refused to go out of the door until Dakin was tied to the porch post. "What in the world ails him, Pa?" asked Sarah. "I never saw him act so."

"Collies are kind of snobs." Pa untied the dog and led him, growling, toward Johnnie, who watched suspiciously. "See, Dakin? Johnnie's all right. Now you be a good dog. You hear?"

Dakin heard. With distrustful drawn lip he

sniffed at the Italian and then stalked back to his porch.

"He'll let you alone all right now," assured Pa easily. "Just don't pay any attention to him."

"Good advice," thought Sarah, listening to Dakin's throaty mutterings, "but I expect they'll pay quite a good deal of attention to each other. My, I wish one or the other of them had to wash up my kitchen floor!" But Sarah knew that however Dakin might glare and mutter, he would not touch the man again.

Sarah wondered about Johnnie's sleeping quarters. It was her first experience with a hired man. Pa felt that it was too much anyway for a girl of her age to keep house and he always had been able to manage an exchange of work with a neighbor. But now Sarah had hired a man, and she felt responsible for his comfort. Johnnie settled the matter himself. That evening after he had disposed of his third large meal, he yawned mightily and said, "I sleepa in the hay. Lika the hay best," he insisted when Sarah protested. "Buona Notte."

Sarah was enchanted. "That's Italian, Pa!" nodding toward the door as if a visible trail of the language were left behind him. "It must mean Good night. Say, Pa, maybe I'll learn some Italian language."

"You'll earn it, Sarah." Pa sounded dismayed. "If you have to cook enough to keep that man. Better let me fire him."

"Well, I should say not!" Sarah cast an indignant eye over her shoulder at Pa as she rinsed the glasses. "These are all ready to wipe now. It's no more work to cook two cabbages than one. You better follow his example, Pa. You wouldn't worry me to death being so thin! So long as he can cutta the hay——"

Pa shook his head as he polished his glass with clumsy slowness.

"You're only a little girl, Sarah, I hate to have you work so hard."

"Me, a little girl!" scoffed Sarah. Then she broke off and stood motionless, her dripping fingers poised over her dish pan. "Listen, Pa, what's that?"

Pa cocked his head on one side. "Well, you might 'a' known," he said. "A Dago is bound to make some kind of music. He's got a harmonica, Sarah!"

Sarah wiped her hands and tiptoed to the door. "Oh, my! Isn't that pretty, Pa? Do you s'pose it is an Italian song?"

"Might be." Pa stood beside her but he kept on polishing at a glass. "Or it might be the Bowery."

Just then Johnnie settled the question by lifting his voice in a tenor flood of foreign-sounding words.

"Oh, Pa!" whispered Sarah, grasping his arm, "I'm glad I hired him!"

"Don't make me drop that glass," warned Pa. "It is real kind of pretty, ain't it? Want to sit down a spell on the porch and listen?"

Sarah slipped into the old porch rocker and sat motionless, leaning forward as if to meet the melody which flowed out of the great barn doors. She thought of the wheezy melodeon at church puffing and blowing at its psalm tunes. Could this be music, too, this outburst like the birds? All threaded with laughter and queer little sad notes. Sarah drew a deep breath. "My, Pa, I wish I could do that."

The dishes were so delayed by the musicale in the barn that the next night Pa suggested that Johnnie join them on the porch after the dishes were done. "You tie-a the dog, I helpa the dish," promised Johnnie.

Dakin, protesting, was shut into the woodshed. The dishes in Johnnie's swift hands were finished before Pa got his glasses wiped.

"You do them fine," commended Sarah.

"Where did you learn?" Though, after all, she thought, Italians must eat off of dishes.

"In New Yor-r-rk," said Johnnie, sadly. "Ah-h-h!" he burst forth, "la bella Nuova Yor-r-rk!"

"Would you rather be there?" asked Sarah, curiously.

"Would I? Could I?" his voice rose. "Ah-h! Lights, people all around, they danca, they playa. Here so still, so dead, so nothing—" his voice died away in his dramatic interpretation of his emotions.

"Well, now," said Pa reasonably, "why didn't you stay there?"

The bright dark eyes slid suspiciously over towards Pa. "I went away," he said briefly. "What you call business."

"Well, well," said Pa, guilelessly, "quite a way to come. On your way back now?"

"Soon as I getta the mon!" Then as if he could not withstand their sympathetic interest. "I go for a rich man!" he waved a passionate dish towel. "I leava my little store. I go far away to Canada. I do what he tella me. And then where am I? No mon for a ticket! I walk back!" Sarah thought he was going to burst into tears. "And my little store! Where is she? Where is she?" He wrung the dish towel.

"Well, now," said Pa comfortingly, "I guess she's all right. What about a little music now?"

The volatile Italian forgot his sorrow. Out of his pocket came the harmonica and he led the way proudly to the porch.

"Some kind of a bootlegging mixup," murmured Pa reassuringly to Sarah, who still looked sad. "Once he gets back he'll let them alone."

Except for Dakin, the concert was a success. Dakin expostulated from the shed when the harmonica began, but he quieted down until the tenor voice pealed forth in an Italian boat-song. Then the mournful howl of his accompaniment drowned out Johnnie. Santa Lucia broke off on a high note.

"Thata dog!" sputtered Johnnie, pocketing his harmonica and starting for the barn. "He lika nothing I do!"

Johnnie had summed the situation up pretty well. Dakin cared neither for Johnnie nor for his music. Whenever Johnnie spoke to him in Italian, Dakin growled. "Probably has reason to," Pa suggested. The collie seemed to enjoy bullying someone who was afraid of him. He would rise suddenly from behind the woodbine-sheltered corner of the porch and look at Johnnie, who would walk rapidly backward until he was out of sight.

Then Dakin would lie down again, head between paws, for what Sarah called a wide-awake nap.

"Alla the time a porch hound," complained Johnnie, who liked the porch himself. "Alla the time stare!"

"What's the matter, Dakin? Has Billy gone home?" Sarah asked him. But that afternoon she saw Billy down on the shore chasing gulls by himself. Dakin had refused to go clamming with her and she had left him lying in the corner of the porch.

"I'd think he was sick," she considered, "if he didn't eat his three squares a day. My goodness!" she groaned. "Everybody manages to eat his three squares a day! I wouldn't tell Pa, but I'm glad the haying season is no longer than it is. The only way Johnnie knows that a meal's over is when there isn't a crumb left on a table. He's no farmer, either." She shook her head sadly. "I could cut hay faster than he does. He'd rather sit around and tell about how nice New York is. Oh, well, he's better than nothing for Pa."

She began to count the clams as she threw them into the hod: "*uno*, *due*, *tre*, *quattro*—But it wouldn't be much of a chowder," she decided, "if there weren't any more clams in it than I could count in Italian. *Buona Notte!*" she called to a

sandpiper who teetered past. The sandpiper bowed and said, "Peek! Peék!"

"It should be good-day, I know," explained Sarah, "but I haven't learned that yet."

After the last drop of the chowder for supper had been drained from the kettle for Johnnie's third enormous bowl, he pushed his chair back and started for the door.

"No wipa the dish tonight," he explained apologetically. "What you call business in la ville."

Pa looked up, a little anxious. "Five miles to the village, Johnnie," he said. "Better play the harmonica awhile and go to bed. Hard day tomorrow in the west field."

Johnnie smiled conciliatingly. "I worka twice so hard," he promised.

"Even that wouldn't hurt him," murmured Pa. "Say, look at Dakin."

Down the path to the road stalked Dakin, about ten feet behind the little Italian. "Johnnie'll get a stiff neck looking over his shoulder if Dakin goes all the way to the village with him. Guess I'll call him back." But at the angle of the road where Johnnie turned to town, Dakin stopped. He watched down the road a few minutes, then with a great shake of his body, he raced

off in the opposite direction. Almost at once on the still evening air came the medley of collie and Airedale voices which announced Dakin's arrival at the boarding house.

"They take the same evening off, Johnnie and Dakin, don't they, Pa? Well, I'm glad Dakin's getting a little exercise. He'll get stout sitting all day."

"If he comes back before Johnnie, better tie him to the porch post. He'd scare the life out of the poor little feller if he jumped at him."

Apparently jumping at Johnnie was the only thing that Dakin didn't do. Sarah was wakened about midnight by his roars and plunges at the end of his clanking chain. "That you, Johnnie?" she heard Pa's sleepy voice.

"No, thata your dog," sputtered Johnnie. "Me you do not hear."

The barn door rolled shut, but for a long time Dakin rumbled and grumbled from his porch bed.

The day's work which Johnnie promised to double was shortened somewhat by surreptitious naps under any convenient hedge of alder bush. "Not feela so well," explained Johnnie at night over a huge mound of potato which he was rapidly lowering.

"You stayed out too late," said Sarah severely.

Johnnie looked hurt. "No so late," he expostulated. "In New Yor-rk the night is just begin."

"This isn't New York." Sarah was still short. She hated to see Pa work so hard.

Johnnie heaved a great sigh. "*Che vuole!* Here work alla the day, sleep alla the night. No fun!"

"Did you have fun last night?" inquired Pa.

Sarah thought, "No matter how tired he is, he's always kind."

Johnnie's face lit up. "O, *si! si! si!* A movie pic! Broadway with banditto!" He brandished an imaginary pistol. "Shoota the man, drum go bang! bang! I jump. Mucha the fun." Then, with quick change of mood, "Maka me think of my little store. Where is she now? Where is she now?" He slouched despondently in his chair.

Sarah, who could never get used to the emotional outbursts of his southern temperament, stirred uneasily. "Guess she's just as well off," she muttered, and then flushed at the look in Pa's tired eyes.

"Better go right to bed, Johnnie," advised Pa, "and get rested up after all this bandit business."

Johnnie rose importantly. "You sitta still *un momentino*," he begged. "I come!" and he hurried

out to the barn. In one *momentino* he was back with an oblong red box in his hand. Marching around to Sarah he bowed stiffly from his waist and passed her the box. "A small little *complimento*," he explained, "to the cooka."

Sarah did not know that she cared to be called the cook, but she opened the red box curiously.

"Oh, Johnnie! A harmonica! What a good boy you were!" In spite of some gray threads of hair, irresponsible Johnnie seemed a boy to Sarah. She blew a sweet, high tone on it. "Oh, Johnnie! Will you teach me how to play it?"

Johnnie's face shone with ecstasy. "Sure! I learna you alla *la bella musica Italiana.* And then maybe 'My Countree-She-An-Dee!' "

Sarah giggled. "I bet I can play that, now," she said, and blew an experimental breath or two. In a few minutes she had drawn out the first line of "My Country 'Tis of Thee." "Oh, listen, Pa! I did it myself!"

Johnnie was impatient. "Not mucha good," he announced. He drew out his own harmonica. "Now I showa you."

On one side of the table Sarah leaned on her elbows, her jade-blue eyes glowing over the little instrument. On the other side Johnnie faced her, his somber black eyes intent on space as he

breathed softly his Italian boat-song. But between them lay the supper dishes. And finally a faint snore from Pa on the sofa reminded Sarah of them.

The lesson over, Johnnie yawned enormously and faded away toward the barn loft. Pa slept on. But Sarah raced through her dishes, oblivious of their desertion. If you breathed out, this happened. If you drew your breath in, that happened. And how was it the third phrase of the boat-song went? Johnnie had said, "Keepa the song in the head. Then it come out on the lip." She took the harmonica upstairs with her and blew softly on it a few minutes before she put out the light.

In the evenings that followed Sarah made rapid progress. A starved love of music which had come to life as she had listened to the Italian songs, now grew and flowered in her. With passionate effort she won the exact and delicate grace notes from her little instrument which Johnnie demanded. He would accept nothing but the best from his pupil and so enamored was he of her progress that he would have given her several lessons a day if she had consented.

"Go back to your work," Sarah would tell him severely when he blew an ingratiating note through the kitchen door. "I shall not touch that

harmonica until after the supper dishes are washed."

And Johnnie learned that she meant it. Though he never knew how many times a day her eyes turned longingly to the old clock case where she kept it. It had seemed a safe place to remind her of what she must not do.

When Sarah had learned to carry her tune with the perfection which satisfied Johnnie, he supplied a soft accompaniment to it on his own instrument, which seemed to Sarah a duet of angels. She felt a kind of ecstatic lifting of spirit with the music, a release from all the responsibilities which had a way of pressing heavily sometimes on her young shoulders.

Johnnie, however, except for the intervals of music, grew more restless and discontented. He addressed Dakin in no uncertain tones whenever the dog growled at him, which was whenever Johnnie approached the porch. Dakin still kept to his corner except when Johnnie took an evening off at the village. And the dog, too, became constantly more morose. Sarah sometimes was quite distracted between them. In spite of the music she felt relief when the haying season was over.

"Where are you going now?" asked Pa as he pulled out an old tobacco pouch from the cup-

board shelf and paid Johnnie his last week's wages.

Johnnie was in a black mood. "Go? Go?" he held out his handful of money. "Where coulda the poor man go? To no place."

"If you'd saved your wages, Johnnie," said Sarah, incautiously, "you'd get part way to New York anyway."

Johnnie glowered at her. "Sava the mon!" He lifted a scornful palm toward the countryside. "Sava the mon is all they do here! Me, I have fun!"

"Yes," said Sarah, practically, "but you can't get back to New York and your little store on fun." Then she remembered that part of those wages had gone for her harmonica. She turned repentantly to the pantry and began to pack a large shoe-box with lunch for Johnnie to eat on the road.

"*Addio!*" she called after him as he slouched down the path, Dakin ten feet behind. And then she blew him a line from "Good Night, Ladies." But Johnnie scarcely turned except to keep an eye on Dakin in the rear. At the end of the path he hesitated, then started off toward the village. Dakin went through his usual ritual of watching the departure and then, as if he realized that his

vigilance was finally released, he gave a loud "Whoof!" of relief. The Italian turned and shook a fist at him as the dog galloped off in the opposite direction. But Dakin was already hot on the trail of Billy. His vacation had begun.

Sarah turned back from the red astrachan tree where she had been gathering some apples and watching the parting of the two enemies. "Funny how Dakin never got so he could stand Johnnie," she thought. "Of course he was sort of grouchy, but I'll never forget how he gave me that harmonica. Maybe I'll really learn some music sometime."

After dinner Sarah put on her big sun hat and got her berry pails together. For the last few days she had spent her afternoons in the blueberry pasture and now that Johnnie was gone she felt privileged to spend even more time down there. The blueberry money was her own and it helped out a good deal on books and clothes for school in the winter.

Sarah tucked her harmonica into her pocket, slipped the back-door key under the porch steps, and started for the pasture down by the shore. Dakin had refused to go anywhere with her for so long that she was almost startled to hear him pounding along behind her.

"Why, Dakin!" she cried, "I thought you were a porch hound. Aĭn't you afraid of taking too much exercise all at once?"

Dakin broke into the volley of sharp barks which always announced his departure from the place, and raced ahead of Sarah down the shore path.

"He really acts delighted because Johnnie has gone," Sarah thought. "Now I miss him quite a lot. I even got six too many potatoes in the pot this noon. Well, I do hope he gets back to his precious New York pretty soon, and finds out about his little store, where is she now, where is she now. Poor Johnnie, it's a long walk for him, and he couldn't save a cent if he never got there. He's not so young, either. I wish we could have afforded to do something for him. Well, this isn't getting my next winter's school dress!" and she squatted down beside some bushes which hung heavy with the velvety blue berries.

Sarah had a great sense of leisure down there in the sweet-smelling pasture. Pa was off in the back wood lot for the day, supper was all cooked, Dakin was lying in the shade beside her, and there was the whole lovely afternoon to herself. Now and then she drew out her harmonica, and lying on her back beside Dakin she stared into the lark-

spur blue of the sky and played soft phrases of *Santa Lucia.* Dakin sat up sharply at her first note and looked suspiciously about him. Then he lay down again and paid no further attention.

The shadows were growing long when Sarah finally picked up her full pails and strolled back to the house. She felt curiously rested and refreshed, released from all pressure. At the entrance to their own lane Dakin suddenly put his nose to the ground and started on the run up the path. He was barking impatiently at the back door as she rounded the corner of the house.

"Gone crazy again?" inquired Sarah. "You can't get in until I unlock the door." She felt under the step. "Well, Pa must have come back early. I must hurry with supper." She pushed the door open into an empty kitchen. "Hullo, Pa," she called out, "where are you? Dakin, I wish you'd keep quiet a minute. What do you want in that cupboard anyway? Why, what in the world—" she leaned down and picked up the soft brown object which Dakin was nosing around on the floor. It was Pa's old tobacco pouch, and it was empty.

Sarah shook it automatically. "Not one cent left," she said. Then with stiff lips, "Why, of course. Pa must have wanted the money in a hurry

for something. Oh, Pa!" Her voice sounded uncertain and she cleared her throat. "Oh, Pa, you up stairs?"

"Coming, Sarah," she heard him from the barn. "What's your hurry?"

Sarah laughed aloud with relief and ran out to meet him with the little pouch in her hand. Dakin was still rummaging noisily about the room.

"Pa, whatever did you spend all that money for while I was gone?" She looked up into his face. "You didn't! Why, *Pa!* Someone's stole it!" Incredulous horror was in her voice.

"I just came down from the wood lot." Pa sounded a little dazed. "Was the door locked, Sarah?"

"The key was where I always put it." She pointed to the porch step. "But I found it in the door."

They looked at each other, unhappily certain.

"I'll hitch up Minnie and drive down toward the village, but he's not likely to be sitting along the roadside. Guess it's gone, Sarah."

"I'm coming too," announced Sarah valiantly.

Dakin ran ahead of the horse, nose to the ground, but at the road he turned up instead of

down. Pa hesitated a moment and then pulled the left rein. "Guess he knows, Sarah," he said heavily. "You see, Johnnie could get a New York train at Ellsworth."

"Well, anyway," encouraged Sarah, "it's twenty miles to Ellsworth, and that gives us plenty of time to catch up with him."

But Dakin had suddenly stopped his running and begun an anxious snuffling about the side of the road. Pa drew up the horse. "Just what I was afraid of," he said. "Someone's given him a lift. Say, Ben," he called out to a farmer who had slowed up his Ford car, "you didn't see my Dago Johnnie as you came down the road, did you?"

"Sure did," drawled Ben, "and he was workin' harder than I ever see him work before. Helpin' a man with a blowout about five miles up the road. An' he sure was hustlin' and cussin' in Dago!"

Pa was out of his wagon and tying Minnie to a spruce sapling in a little wood road.

"I'd be obliged for a lift back there," he said shortly. "I'll make it all right with you."

Ben seemed to scent excitement. He threw open the rear door of his car and scarcely noticed when Dakin piled in on top of Pa and Sarah. In an instant the clutch jangled into place and the car whizzed noisily up the road.

Sarah held to the side of the car and Dakin peered anxiously over the front seat. "Speed limit's off if you say so," Ben called back over his shoulder.

Dakin saw Johnnie first, but at Dakin's announcing roar he sprang into the bushes. Dakin did not wait for the car to stop. Sarah shuddered as she heard him plunge into the bushes. "Run, Pa!" she cried. "Dakin's going to kill him!"

Pa was out of the car. "You stay there, Sarah," he called. "I'll be back in a minute."

Sarah shivered into the corner of the car and watched the darkening woods. The two men talked in low tones over the tire which they finished changing. After a while Pa came back, his hand through Dakin's collar. He slipped a bill into the strange driver's hand. "Be glad if you see that my hired man gets his train," he said. "He forgot something and I'm afraid it's kind of delayed him." Still holding Dakin's collar, he pushed him ahead of him into the car and slammed the door. "Well, I guess we're all right to go back now, Ben," he announced.

They drove back the five miles in silence. Not until they were once more behind the patient Minnie did Sarah expect any explanation. "After all, Pa kind of feels that Johnnie belonged to the

family," she thought. "He wouldn't want strangers to know."

The explanation was brief. "I gave him back enough to pay his fare to New York, Sarah. I know how I'd a felt if I'd been in New York and wanted to get down here. He felt awful bad. You see he really liked us. He just couldn't seem to think far enough ahead."

Sarah's eyes looked suspiciously bright. "Now we'll have to go without shingling the barn roof another year. And you know how it leaks!"

Pa looked guilty. "I've been thinking, Sarah, that a little tar paper will fix up those leaks all right. Won't look so nice, perhaps, but it's watertight."

Sarah was crying silently.

"Why, Sarah!" Pa's voice was startled. "Do you mind so much as that?" He hauled up Minnie as if he considered going back to get the money.

"'Tisn't shingles," Sarah grieved. "It's Johnnie. We trusted him and you were so good to him. And then see what he did to you. I don't feel as if I could believe in anybody again."

Pa's tender, tolerant smile brooded over the downcast red head at his shoulder.

"You feel that way at first"—he clucked to

Minnie. Sarah thought gratefully he doesn't say when you are young. "But by and by you see there's all kinds of people and some of 'em don't get as much chance as others. What they don't know they can't help," he went on philosophically. "You wouldn't feel too bad if Dakin carried off a bone when he was awful hungry, now would you? Might scold him a little—" he grinned at the gleam in the wet jade eyes, "but you'd know he was some good after all."

At his name Dakin rubbed a worried nose into Sarah's hand. Something still seemed wrong even if his enemy had disappeared. Pa laughed. "Johnnie said, 'He theenk I steal. So after awhile I theenk I steal.' "

Sarah's lips curved up. She rubbed Dakin's velvet head thoughtfully. "Johnnie *was* comical," she admitted, "and he did like us, and he gave me a harmonica and taught me how to play on it. I suppose he did want that money pretty bad, Pa." She regarded Dakin. "Bobby says you make his pigs so nervous they can't stay in the pen. Johnnie says you put bad ideas into his head. Seems as if we might lead a real peaceful life if it wasn't for you, Dakin."

DAKIN'S
LITTLEST PIG

DAKIN TAKES
HIS PIG HOME

Chapter VI

DAKIN'S LITTLEST PIG

SARAH spread her dish towels on the grass and whistled Dakin out from under the lilac bush. He rose reluctantly from the cool shadow.

"Most too hot to move," she agreed, "but I'd rather pant under a lilac bush than wash somebody's dishes in a scalding kitchen. I'd just as soon not have a job a day like this!"

Half-way down the path they passed Bobby stretched out in a hammock under the apple-tree.

"Sure you got your work all done?" he inquired.

"Yes, I am," Sarah snapped. "And you'd be a good deal better off if you'd get rid of ten pounds or so doing the same thing."

"Is that so?" Bobby bulged dangerously over the edge. "Well, you just wait till your advice is asked. See?"

Sarah stalked on. Bobby was irritating enough any kind of weather. But on a hot day! Well,

Sarah just didn't see how his mother could stand him!

"Here, you Dakin! Come away from that pen. I've told you to let Bobby's pigs alone."

Dakin yapped, his nose to the ground, his haunches high in the air. He seemed to be having a good time. Sarah left the path to investigate.

"Say, Bobby," she called back over her shoulder. "That littlest pig is out again. Better mend your pen instead of lazing 'round in a hammock."

No answer.

"Hey! Your pig's out! Better mend your fence!" Sarah could always get Bobby's attention if she really tried. She watched him, out of the corner of her eye, roll out of the hammock and lumber down the path. "Looks read mad," she thought. "Don't know as we'll wait, Dakin."

"You put that pig back, yourself, Sarah Thurston! If it wasn't for your old dog, he'd stay where he belongs."

"My dog! Well, of all the—" Sarah picked the little pig up and dropped it lightly over the fence. Out it scooted through the hole. "My dog, is it?" Suddenly the impish look fled from Sarah's green eyes. Even her dancing red hair seemed to quiet down. She sat on the stone wall and eyed Bobby

thoughtfully as he kicked some dirt into the hole through which he had urged the return of his pig.

"Just the thing!" she muttered. "If it hadn't been too hot to think, I'd have had sense enough to realize it. Probably cost more than a necktie, but my! wouldn't Pa be tickled! And I could take it home with me tomorrow on his birthday. Say, Bobby!" Sarah's irritation had completely vanished. Dakin leaped to his feet at the eagerness in her voice. "How much'll you sell me that littlest pig for?"

Bobby sent a scathing look at the girl and dog. "Nothing," he growled. "Just nothing at all."

Sarah grinned at him. She never harbored any spite against the fat boy. "Oh, I'd expect to pay *something*," she said. "How about five dollars?"

"Five dollars your grandmother!" Bobby slouched back toward the hammock. "I can get ten any minute for those Berkshires. But I wouldn't let you have one if you papered it all over with ten dollar bills."

"Well, I ain't thinking of making your pig a coat like that," Sarah raged. "Come on, Dakin, we'll go home."

She marched up the road oblivious, in her angry disappointment, to the heat and dust. "That was such a good idea!" she thought. "I could have

paid for it from dish washing wages in about three weeks. I know Bobby's mother would have let me. Pa's wanted a pig all spring. Honest, if Bobby was my boy—" She shut her lips together. Then the impish look came back. "Well, I suppose I didn't have much foresight. No sense in getting a boy like Bobby all riled up on a hot day if you want him to do something. My! My! And Pa would have specially liked a Berkshire!"

Sarah's low opinion of her own diplomacy had increased by the next morning. It had been too impossibly hot to walk to the village for a necktie for Pa, and except for the birthday cake which would hardly hold icing even in the cool cellarway, she had no gift at all. Pa wouldn't care, but Sarah did. "I declare if I'll even speak to that Bobby again." She stalked by the hammock and ordered Dakin into his shady lilacs. "And there Pa helped him pick out his Berkshires and everything! But of course," she amended honestly, "it was me, not Pa, he refused to sell 'em to. Oh, well!"

Her thoughts accompanied her competent fingers as they piled the dishes into place and brought order back to the untidy kitchen. Just as she gave the cupboard doors their final click, she heard Bobby yell.

"Sarah! Hi, Sarah! Come out here quick."

"Yes, I will," she scoffed. Then over Bobby's voice came Dakin's roar. Sarah dashed for the door. "I've certainly got to leave Dakin at home after this. I can't stand this everlasting rowing."

Since Bobby's voice sounded down near the pig pen, Sarah seized her hat from the nail. "Going right by there anyway. Might as well stop," she said.

"Hi, Sarah! For goodness sake, can't you hurry? Catch 'em quick! Oh, my gosh! There goes the last one!" Bobby tried to recover himself from an ineffectual grab and finished his sentence on all fours. "In the woods! The whole bunch of 'em. All my Berkshires." His excited little eyes peered up at her over his round cheeks in a way that reminded Sarah irresistibly of his lost property. "Get 'em, Sarah! Gosh, can't you do *something?*" Down through the woods they could hear the scattering of twigs and leaves.

"Sure!" said Sarah. Poor Bobby, no use being mad at him, and it was mean to laugh at him. Better have mended his fence, though. But she wouldn't tell him that just now.

Dakin, who had been prancing around the pen with little side darts toward the woods, stopped

his barking and stood beside Sarah looking eagerly up into her face for orders.

"He brings the cow in and he helps with the sheep at shearing. Dakin, listen! Go get the pigs. Go get the pigs. Go get the pigs. Now, wait, we are going too."

Over the low wall they scattered into the woods. "You go left. I'll go right. And just let Dakin go where he wants," called Sarah. "We'll bunch them up there in the clearing."

Through the brush, over rocks, into marshy holes they doubled and crawled and ran. The woods steamed in the heat. "Don't know any reason why they ever need to grease a pig," scolded Sarah, as the curly tail of the littlest pig slipped through her fingers. "Here's four, Bobby," she called. "You sit down there in the clearing, and Dakin will know where to drive them."

Bobby melted down into the moss with a flop. So far he had not caught one. Sarah shooed another little black scuttler into the group and sank down beside him. The runaways were thoroughly tired now and frightened. They nosed at each other and one by one dropped into the moss. Beyond the edge of the clearing came crackling of sticks as Dakin rounded up his charges. Nearer, and they could hear him panting. Then like over-

size black beetles, four little Berkshires scuttled across the clearing and flung themselves into the exhausted group on the moss.

Bobby sat up and counted. "Nine. All but one. Say, we did a pretty good job. Gee, but it was hard work!"

"*We!*" Sarah found that she still had a little breath. "*We?* A lot of good you were! Dakin did the whole job. Even the ones I caught, he drove in. *We!*"

Bobby's heat-purpled face took on a deeper hue. "Dakin!" he roared. "All the time Dakin! If it hadn't been for that yapping Dakin of yours, they'd never have got out. Yes, sir!" he interrupted Sarah's attempt to speak. "Yes, sir! Every day he barks at 'em and gets 'em so nervous they can't stay in the pen. If it wasn't for him—" he stopped his apoplectic outburst at Sarah's rather alarming aspect.

Somehow in the midst of the heat she had managed to achieve a frigid appearance. She pulled herself up against a birch trunk and leaned back, the cool green of her eyes on Bobby. The big collie panted at her feet.

"All right," she said. "I guess if that's the case we'd better call Dakin off the job. How're you

going to find your other pig? And how are you going to get these back to the barn?"

Bobby blustered through his alarm. "I wouldn't go after that other pig if I never had him. It's just the little runt anyway. No good." He looked at Sarah speculatively. "Ain't you coming back this way?"

Sarah declined. "Guess I'll rest awhile." She fanned herself with a huge brake leaf. "You'd better go on before they start running away again."

But the young Berkshires had run far enough. When Bobby tried to prod them into action they only dug themselves into the moss with soft grunts.

"Won't move," said Bobby.

"I see they won't," replied Sarah.

"What I better do?" Bobby allowed himself a last appeal.

"Might carry them," suggested Sarah.

"Well, by gosh, I will!" stormed Bobby, "and I don't need any of your help nor your ole dog's neither."

"Not likely to get any." Sarah was still cool. But in the next half hour she almost relented. The day was so hot!

Through the woods stumbled Bobby, a pig's

black snout peering back over his shoulder at Sarah, its sharp hoofs tattooing Bobby's pongee shirt. The fat boy fairly dripped.

"Take a pound or two off him, anyway." Sarah hardened her heart. "The idea of his saying Dakin drove his old pigs out." Bobby was about to make his ninth trip and Sarah rose to leave. "Well," she informed him, "we kept 'em together for you while you were off. Say, what about that littlest one? Don't you want us to find him for you? Kind of too bad to lose him."

Bobby hoisted the last pig to his shoulder and turned his smeared face toward her. Sarah giggled. Those four little eyes! "I wouldn't lug that pig home if it was the last one on earth. I hope it starves," he panted.

Sarah considered Bobby's receding back. Then she snapped her fingers into the air. "Pig's ours," she announced to Dakin. "All we got to do is to find him."

Dakin looked only faintly interested. He had done his morning's work.

"One more pig, Dakin. Go find him. I'll help."

Dakin rose, stretched fore and aft, and panted steamily into Sarah's face. Then he gave himself a shake and started off. Sarah listened to the

crackling of his departure and took the opposite direction. But the woods were quiet. Except for the incessant gossip of an indefatigable vireo, everything seemed silenced by the heat. Sarah was ready to agree with Bobby that no pig was worth all that trouble, when she found herself on the back wood path that came out at the schoolhouse. Still no sign of Dakin, no sound of any kind. She sat down a moment in the shade to catch her breath.

"Might as well go home," she thought. "Dakin may have been side-tracked by a rabbit and won't be back until afternoon. And here I haven't got an earthly thing for poor Pa's dinner but a birthday cake."

She rose wearily and tramped down the alder-grown path. Now and then she whistled just as a signal to Dakin if he happened to be coming that way. Almost at the schoolhouse where the path had been cleared and straightened, Sarah looked back and saw them coming. The littlest pig moved slowly but with Dakin's urgent nose at his heels, he moved.

"My soul and body!" cried Sarah. "What have you been in to?"

Both the pig and Dakin were coated with mud. Not a clean spot on them. "The back marsh!

Dakin got it out of the back marsh! How'd he ever do it? Dakin, you smart dog!"

Dakin waved a marsh-bedragged tail. The little pig lay down flat like a mud pie. But Dakin had more persuasive methods than Bobby. He nosed his charge up and started it off ahead of him with proud unawareness of the effect they created. Sarah dared not laugh. But she kept her distance behind them.

At the schoolhouse steps she considered. "The poor little thing can never walk all the way home down that hot road. Neither can I carry it. Nobody'd want to give us a lift. And I've got to get Pa's dinner. As Bobby says, 'What I better do?' "

She had just decided to shut the pig in the wood-house till she could come back after it, when an empty hay wagon came rattling down the road. "My goodness, it's Pa!" she cried, "on his way home for his dinner. Hi, Pa! Hold on a minute."

But Dakin, prancing delightedly around the horse's head, had already held up the wagon. Pa let the reins droop as he leaned forward and stared at the dog.

"Mud bath?" he asked. "Curing him of something?"

Sarah grinned up at Pa. "Wait till you see the

other one." She ran back and pushed the recumbent mud pie to its feet. "Your birthday present, Pa. Like it?"

"I might if it was scraped off so's I could see what it was," said Pa, tentatively. "Sarah, what you been doing? Clamming?"

Sarah gave the little pig a boost into the back of the hay cart, then stood aside while Dakin followed in a spray of mud. She climbed up on the seat beside Pa and slouched wearily against him.

"Get up, Minnie!" Pa picked up the reins. "All beat out, ain't you, Sarah? What on earth you been doing?"

Sarah roused herself to a telling recital. Pa listened in judicial silence. "Well," he said finally, "I don't know of anything I'd rather have than one of Bobby's Berkshires. Saw some not so good over in Wayville selling at twelve dollars. But it kind of seems to me that this pig is still Bobby's."

Sarah sighed deeply. "It is," she said. "I knew it just as soon as I laid eyes on it. My, wasn't I foolish to waste all that energy!"

"Oh, I don't know. Kind of too bad to leave the little crittur foundering in the marsh. I'll tell you. I'll see if I can't get a plain ordinary pig cheap. Got to use up your skim milk, ain't we?"

"Don't want to waste my skim milk on a cheap pig," said Sarah, bitterly. "All that trouble, no birthday present, no dinner, no anything."

"Well, *something*, I'd say," murmured Pa cryptically. "Whoa, Minnie! Want I should drive you up into Bobby's yard?"

"No, I'll manage." Sarah lifted the pig down with gingerly hands. "You don't need to come, Dakin."

But Dakin disagreed. He might miss something if he stayed behind. "You wouldn't want to come if you knew how you looked," she informed him.

Bobby came to the door. His wet smooth hair and clean soapy look marked him as straight from the bath. Sarah pointed a grimy finger at the mud-caked little creature beside Dakin.

"There's your pig," she said shortly, and turned on her heel.

"My gosh!" she heard Bobby gasp. "My gosh! What you been doing to him?"

Sarah wheeled with a flare. She had reached the limit of her endurance. "Not one thing," she informed the fat boy. "But, if you want to know, Dakin got him out of the back marsh just before he smothered in it. And if you don't believe it, look at them both!"

"I'm looking," said Bobby, "and I never saw a worse sight. Well, Sarah," he visibly softened as he eyed the forlorn group, "I'm certainly obliged."

"Don't mention it," said Sarah stiffly. Then she hesitated. It would do no harm to try, and now she knew how much Pa wanted a Berkshire —"You don't want to sell him now, do you? I guess I could manage ten dollars if you'll wait for it. And he's not so big as the others."

A pause. Sarah, torn between breathless suspense and desperation at her own extravagance, eyed Bobby's reflective face. Bobby was looking at Dakin, who still guarded his charge.

"Well, I don't know." Bobby shifted his little eyes to Sarah. "What you want of it, anyway?"

Sarah started to say none of your business. "Birthday present for Pa," she compromised abruptly.

"Why didn't you say so, then?" Bobby sounded abused. "Sure, take him for nothing. You might 'a' known I'd see that Mr. Thurston had a birthday present. He's a mighty nice——"

"Because I don't go round begging birthday presents for my father," interrupted Sarah, fiercely. "Good-bye!"

"Now, hold on, Sarah. If you only had as nice

ways as your father!" Bobby sighed at her perversity. "You know as well as I do that that pig doesn't belong to me any more. In fact I don't know whose he is unless he's Dakin's." He sat down on the steps to reflect more deeply. Sarah's tired face began to light up. "I said I didn't want him, now didn't I? He could have drowned in the ole marsh for all of me, now couldn't he? Dakin got him out. And, gosh! he made an awful mess of it. Now, hold on, don't get excited. If you was only more like your Pa! Well, anyway—" he rose to make his ultimate decision, and stood like a gowned judge in his long bathrobe, "the pig belongs to Dakin, and you know it as well as I do. He can give it to your Pa if he wants to."

Sarah made an impulsive dart toward Bobby and he shut the screen door between them. "You *are* good, Bobby! I won't make you mad any more. I'll stop teasing you."

"Not till you stop breathing, you won't." Bobby's bitter comment reached Sarah as he receded rapidly up the stairway.

She stood a moment, contrite. "I suppose that's so," she said. "Though maybe if I did try to be more like Pa—" She broke a switch from the lilac bush and helped Dakin urge the poor littlest pig once more down the path. Without a word she

hoisted it back into the cart. Pa watched her gravely.

"Well," he said, as Minnie started up the road, "Bobby's not so bad, is he? He kind of got the point, didn't he? Bobby's quite just, he is."

Sarah gave her father a sidewise speculative glance. "Honest, Pa, you know everything. Well, anyway, I guess I'll take a good-sized piece of the cake up to Bobby tomorrow if you don't mind."

Pa smiled down at the heated face close to his shoulder. "No, I don't mind," he drew up the horse at the shore path. "Now you and Dakin go down and get a swim while I set out a few cold victuals for dinner. Guess you'll both feel more like eating when you're cooled off."

Sarah reached around Pa's waist as far as she could in a rare moment of demonstration.

"All right, Pa. We won't be gone two jiffs. And I'll scrape the littlest pig off this afternoon as soon as the mud dries on him."

DAKIN TAKES UP MISSIONARY WORK

DAKIN TREES THE MISSIONARY

134

Chapter VII

DAKIN TAKES UP MISSIONARY WORK

SARAH threw the last braided rug on the grass to sun and air after its beating. All around her they lay, bright little islands on a green sea. She whisked her broom cautiously over the half-moon *Welcome* rug with its hospitable dog's head in wide-mouthed greeting. She dared not risk the vigorous tattoo of her beatings on this old drawn rug.

"More trouble than you're worth," she addressed them, "but you do keep the house kind of cosy in the winter. My, who'd think that it could already be time for fall cleaning!"

The brisk north wind off the bay tossed Sarah's red hair into iridescent threads, the September sun poured color over her and the gay matted grass, the sea behind her flicked its incredible blue into white ravellings of foam—"Wish I could turn the house inside out on the grass," she thought.

"I hate to go in such a day. But I got to get this cleaning done before school begins."

Broom over her shoulder she turned back to the house. "I know," she decided, "I'll wash the windows and then I'll be half in, half out."

As she stopped in the kitchen to get her pail of hot water and cleaning rags, she remembered to look at her pot of beans. "Smell good enough to eat already," she sniffed hungrily as she pushed the brown pot back into the oven. "House-cleaning gives me an awful appetite."

When she finally got back to the living room and swung herself out on the window sill with her soapy cloth, she blinked with surprise into the sun. Was that someone walking around on her clean rugs? She leaned farther out. Oh, that boarder again! The one Dakin didn't like. Queer what likes and dislikes he took. Now here he was off walking in the woods for the whole forenoon with that other boarder, and this little man he couldn't bear. One of the waitresses said he was a missionary. Harmless, Sarah thought.

"But I wish he'd stop tracking dirt on my clean rugs. Ahem!" she coughed.

The little man jumped. "There, I've scared him," Sarah was remorseful. "I should think he'd

have a dreadful time with tigers and things. Good morning," she called. "Fine day!"

"Yes, yes," he was at the window at once, his eyes darting into the room, at Sarah, and back at the rugs.

"I suppose he gets nervous dodging things," Sarah thought tolerantly.

"Is your mother in?" the little man's eager husky voice seemed to fit his darting glance.

The color and light left Sarah as if a lamp had been put out suddenly. "I am the lady of the house," she said simply.

"Oh, well, yes, yes, I see," the black eyes stopped an instant on her and then were off to the rugs again. "Nice rugs you've got there. Oh, say—" suddenly he seemed to shrivel against the clap-boards, "oh, say, kind of call him off, can't you?"

Sarah whirled farther around on the window sill. "Oh, Dakin? You mean him?" she laughed, and like a chameleon the brightness of September crept back into her skin and hair. "Dakin's harmless. Why, you must see lots worse wild animals than him out in Africa or wherever it is you're a missionary."

The little man flung her another glance, its sharpness mixed with entreaty. "Yes, yes, of

course we do. But—oh say, kind of speak to him, can't you?" He pushed back against the house as if he hoped to force an opening for retreat from the advancing collie.

Sarah made a deft turn and dropped lightly on the grass beside the dog who was sniffing with a distasteful grin at the man's white sneakers. She slipped her fingers in the collar buried in his long white ruff.

"He won't hurt you," into her reassurance crept a little scorn.

"Yes, yes, well, I guess I'll go now. It must be most dinner time at the boarding house."

Sarah kept her hand on Dakin until the little scurrying figure had disappeared "Humph!" she said. Then she turned to Dakin. "Now you, young man, come into the house and get your breakfast that you were in too much of a hurry to wait for this morning. You're a nice dog, going off with that big boarder every morning. What you so crazy about him for?"

Dakin wagged an ingratiating tail and made for his plate of scraps.

"Anyway, I'll be glad when the last boarder is gone," grumbled Sarah. Her pail of water had cooled now. "Picking the berries and trompling down the hay all summer! And now of the two

that's left, one's scared to death of Dakin and the other tries to kidnap him. I'll be glad when the boarding house is all closed up for the winter!"

As she polished off the last small square of glass in the living room panes, she heard the screen door bang behind Dakin.

"Off again?" she asked.

The dog put his nose between his paws and hunched up his hind legs. He made sudden little skips toward her. Sarah resisted, but she sighed. She was young, too.

"Got to get the rugs in," she explained, "and then the living room will be done."

The rugs seemed to bring back into the room some of the sunshine in which they had drenched. Sarah surveyed her work with satisfaction. The brass knobs on the old fire frame shone, her own slant-top desk, redolent with furniture oil, showed every band of its smooth maple grain, even the little cross-stitched foot-stool freshened into new design.

"Wish I had a million dollars," she said suddenly. "Wouldn't I have a piano!"

Ever since the hired man, Johnnie, had taught Sarah to play the harmonica, she had hungered unceasingly for more music. Nights all summer she had crept up near the boarding house where

she could hear the little old piano clank out its jazz. Now and then some one really played on it, and Sarah would go home feeling as if she were one of its quivering strings.

She jerked suddenly out of her dreams at Dakin's roar. Then the barking stopped, and Sarah with a relieved sigh, pulled the table cloth out from the cupboard drawer and began to set the table. She heard Pa come into the kitchen and called out, "We got to have baked beans for dinner, Pa, instead of supper. Do you mind?"

"Not so long's you don't make me go to bed afterwards," Pa's voice was muffled in the roller towel. "Guess I can stand it if they eat as good as they smell."

Sarah held the steaming pot over a big dish and let the savory brown beans pour out until they heaped up.

"Well, there's plenty of them anyway," she said, "and they're not much work when I'm house-cleaning."

Pa shook his head. "You do too much. You ought to be having fun."

Sarah looked at him sidewise. From the corners of her eyes she saw his worried little frown. She set the beans down in front of him and bent

an impudent glowing face to his level. "I look kind of sick, don't I, Pa?"

Pa grinned. "I'll tell you what. Let's go down to the auction sale this afternoon at Bradley's. I'll hitch up and we'll drive over as soon as we get this hill o' beans stowed away. Begins about two, I guess."

"Oh, I got the bedrooms to do this afternoon," began Sarah when she saw the worried frown creep back into Pa's face. "But what's the odds? School won't begin for another week, and I'll have plenty of time. Let's go, Pa. P'raps I can pick up a new cake-pan," she lifted mischievous eyes to Pa's relieved face, "or maybe a piano or so."

"We'll have a piano for you some day," promised Pa roundly. "I only hope you won't be too old to pick out a tune on it. Good beans, Sarah. Done just right."

"He's no idea how much I want one," thought Sarah, "and of course I'm as likely ever to get one as a steam yacht. Well, I hope I find a good cake tin."

She wouldn't tell Pa how auction sales always made her feel queer and sad. People having to sell things they had taken so long to get together. They must have liked them so much, too, when

they got them. Oh, well, it was fun to go somewhere with Pa, anyway!

She cleared the table swiftly and set a plate of beans on the step for Dakin. "Gone again!" she whistled down the path and listened. "I should think that boarder friend of his would have to stop walking long enough to eat. Why, Pa," she called back over her shoulder to the porch where Pa was cleaning his shoes, "did you hear someone holler 'Help!'?"

She darted down the path, Pa following with a boot dangling like a loose glove from his wrist. At the turn in the path she stopped so short that she backed into the boot. "My goodness!" she cried, "he's chased the missionary up a tree!"

They stared up at the little missionary perched on an insecure cross saddle of young birch. Dakin rose and wagged a welcoming tail at his folks. As soon as Sarah hooked her fingers into his collar, the little man slipped and slid a hasty descent along the birch trunk. His pocket caught and Sarah saw a three-cornered tear spread out from it.

"Oh, I'll mend it for you," she cried in incoherent remorse, "oh, I'm so sorry, he shouldn't, he never does! Oh, Dakin, why did you?"

The missionary started toward the road with

a sidewise walk (like a crab, Sarah thought) in order to keep an eye on Dakin.

"For three-quarters of an hour," he hurled back in husky anger, "I been settin' in that tree. And now dinner's over and I'm late to a date I had this afternoon!"

"Well, now," mourned Pa, "ain't that too bad! I'll tell you, you come right up to the house and have a dish of baked beans, and then maybe I can take you where you were going. We're driving to the village."

The little man hesitated. Then keeping a wary eye on Dakin, he came back. "All right I will," he grumbled, "if you can get me down to Bradley's by two o'clock."

They overlooked his ungraciousness. "Surest thing!" cried Pa, "we're going right there ourselves. Now that's fine!"

"Lucky there's lots of beans and they stay hot a long time in that thick pot," thought Sarah as she flew about and set a place at the table. "Now you help yourself while I change my dress. We'll be ready as soon as you are."

But the missionary was ready first. When Sarah came back he was standing by her desk in the living room running his finger over the grain. Again he jumped when he saw her.

"Awful nervous for that kind of a job," thought Sarah. "Do sit down, Mr.—er—Mr——"

"White," whispered the little man. "Absalom White." He cleared his throat. "I was just wondering if you wouldn't like to get rid of this old thing and have one of those nice new modern desks with a roll top that you can shut down."

Sarah looked puzzled. "Why, no, I don't know as I would. My grandma had that from her father and she left it to me. It's old, but I kind of like it."

Her fingers slid a loose knob thoughtfully back and forth. "Must get Pa to fix this." The smooth surface, worn and polished by all those busy hands reaching back into the past and somehow belonging to her. . . . She rubbed her palm over the dark grain of the wood and laid the knob on top of the desk where Pa would see it.

"Maybe something else you'd rather buy," the husky voice slid up hopefully. "Victrola or something."

Sarah's throat caught. Music! Now what did he mean? That old desk wasn't worth enough to buy any kind of music. And besides, what could a missionary possibly do with it?

"All ready, folks," called Pa's voice from the

yard. "Hustle up! It's getting along towards two!"

"You think about it," Mr. White was at her elbow. "I'll help you out by giving you something for that old rag Welcome rug in the entry, too. Say ten dollars for both. One of those small Victrolas sounds real cheerful on winter nights."

All the way to the village, Sarah, squeezed in between the two men, stared down at Minnie's broad back and thought. What a funny little man! She didn't like those tinny victrolas much but perhaps she could get a few good records if he wanted to buy another rug or so. Still, what could he do with those old things? Maybe he got homesick out in India or wherever he was, and liked to see a few country things around. Yes, that must be it. She came out of her reverie to find his sharp little eyes sliding around at her. She wriggled toward Pa uncomfortably.

"Not much room, daughter? Well, here we are anyway." He steered Minnie expertly among the Fords and wagons which filled up the Bradley door yard. "Pleased to take you back with us, Mr. White, when you get ready to go."

"No, no, thanks," the little man was out over the wheel and scuttling through the crowd which

tossed friendly greetings at each other. "No, I'll be late maybe," he called back.

"Funny missionary," mumbled Pa as he hitched Minnie. "Take a long time for him to convert me to anything."

"You know, Pa," remarked Sarah as they worked their way into the house, "I don't see how he happened to be up in that tree anyway. He'd had time enough to get out of the yard and up to the boarding house before Dakin went out at all."

"Well," said Pa, "it takes the boarders a long time to get by an apple-tree, I've noticed."

"I mended his pocket and it had no apples in it. Anyway it was a birch tree." She seated herself demurely beside the farmers' wives who were waiting for the bidding to begin, while Pa slouched behind her chair. "Poor Dakin, I hated to tell him he couldn't come, but I suppose it was the least we could do. He'll hunt the other boarder up now."

But Dakin arrived in the middle of the sale trailing his big boarder friend who had apparently dropped in to see what the crowd was about. They both looked a bit sheepish when they saw Sarah. Dakin sat down meekly by her chair while the big boarder leaned over it and apologized.

"Just out walking you know. Perhaps I shouldn't have brought him in. So sorry! Hope you don't mind."

"He's all fussed up," thought Sarah enjoyably. She cast a severe eye on Dakin who thumped his tail faintly. "I told him he *could not come*," she enunciated distinctly for the benefit of Dakin who at once dropped a dejected head on his paws. "But really you know," she relented, "it was because of little Mr. White. He's so scared of him. Dakin loves auctions."

The big boarder looked relieved. "Well, we'll move right on." His eye roved about the room. "Oh, I say, that's a nice desk they've got up now."

Sarah glanced at the platform. "It's a good deal like mine," she said, "only this has lost a knob."

"If I sold mine," her thoughts ran on, "I could keep my papers and things in the attic. Then I could set the Victrola right in that corner. And maybe get some song records and some violin—if he'd like another rug or two." Then she felt the worn old knob between her fingers again, polished with the hands of all those people who belonged to her—"but I want some music," her thoughts flung rebelliously at her.

"Fifteen!" boomed the boarder behind her.

Sarah looked around sharply at him. Fifteen dollars for that old desk! He was muttering angrily. "A gorgeous old piece like that! He'd get it for nothing, would he?"

Who would get it? Sarah searched the background of faces. What farmer would pay fifteen——

"Twenty!" snapped the boarder.

Then she saw Mr. White thrust a weasel-like head forward and raise one finger. Dakin saw him at the same moment and half rose, rumbling in his throat. The little man shrank out of sight.

"What in the world!" Sarah marvelled, "what would he do with it after he got it! Twenty-five dollars! And he offered me ten for mine with the rug. Down, Dakin!"

The bidding went on briskly between the two men. Out of the corner of her eye Sarah could see the scrawny finger thrust persistently up, though the little boarder kept himself well huddled out of sight from Dakin. No one else entered the contest after a ten-dollar offer from a neighbor. At one hundred thirty dollars the desk was knocked down to Absalom White.

Sarah heard the big boarder behind her chuckle.

"Gave him a run for his money anyway," he muttered. "He'll get five times that for it."

Sarah gasped. Was her desk worth all that? She did some quick reckoning and half started from her seat, cheeks scarlet, eyes blazing. The Bradley piano! She knew well enough from country prices at auction sales that it would never fetch more than seventy-five dollars. It was old and two of its keys wouldn't sound. Sarah knew because she had run her fingers softly down the keyboard when they passed it. But a piano! All her own! Would Mr. White give her seventy-five dollars? Ten, he had offered her, with the *Welcome* rug thrown in. Sarah peered behind her, intent on finding that skinny uplifted finger.

There it was, crooked to garner in Mrs. Bradley's old rugs. Sarah leaped to her feet, Dakin alert beside her. Pa was out in the barn looking over some tools.

"*You* take him," she whispered desperately to the big boarder who watched her, puzzled. "He doesn't like Mr. White."

"Neither do I," she thought she heard him say. But he had detained Dakin and that was enough. Sarah slipped between chairs and standing people to the back of the room. There she could see Mr. White.

"When he finishes with the rugs, I'll ask him," she thought. "The piano won't be put up yet awhile."

She watched his bidding, fascinated by the greed on his sharp face, the rhythmic demand of the finger. As she watched, she thought of that finger crooking about the knobs of her beautiful old desk worn smooth by the hands of her own people, those ferret eyes searching the cubby holes which had always held the treasures of her family. She thought of how sorry she always felt when people had to sell their things at auction. She suddenly got a sense of the generations reaching behind her, of herself, of young people like herself in the years and years to come. Why, the desk belonged to all of them! What right had she to sell it?

Trembling a little with the shock of her vision and the illumination it had turned on her, she slipped into the kitchen and sat down on one of the deserted chairs. When the big boarder with Dakin in his tow peered cautiously around the door, Sarah roused herself to beckon them in.

"Did you get him?" he asked.

"No, I changed my mind," said Sarah.

"That's good. He's a pretty sharp dealer, and I wouldn't do business with him if I were you.

Well, Dakin and I will be getting along back. We need the exercise, eh, boy?"

Dakin looked a bit distracted at leaving Sarah, but after all she hadn't invited him to stay. He and the big man struck off at a good pace across the yard.

Dealer? So that was it. She had heard of these men who went about buying furniture. She walked out to the barn and stood about close to Pa, waiting for him to buy the tools he had selected. When the lot had been knocked down to him, he took the bundle triumphantly under his arm and they made their way to patient Minnie nodding in her shafts. On the way home Sarah, very quiet, sat close to Pa on the wagon seat. "I'll tell him all about it tonight," she thought. "He ought to keep an eye on me. I'm not fit to be allowed to do as I please the way he lets me."

"Too bad you didn't get your cake-pan but I'll send by stage and get you a shiny new one. Nice feller, that big boarder," rumbled on Pa. "Says his name is Angus McDonald and that's why he likes collies. Scotch, you know. He was telling me about what he does—Whoa, Minnie! What's the matter with you!"

Minnie took a kittenish side step that nearly shied the wagon into the alders where their own

path curved away from the road. Pa hauled her up short and peered out into the thick September twilight.

"Hey, Dakin! What you doing!" he clambered over the wheel. "Treed another porcupine?"

A fine red point of light rose up in the dark and moved toward them. Behind it loomed the big shape of the boarder. Sarah sniffed a whiff of cigarette smoke. "Oh, you needn't have waited," she slid over the wagon's edge, "Dakin would have been all right here alone."

"He might have been," agreed the deep voice, "but I wasn't so sure about his quarry."

"My heavens!" she heard Pa say. He stood staring up at a black blot on the white birch. "You up in that tree again? Roost just like a hen at night, don't you?" He shook the tree trunk.

"Hm," thought Sarah, "Pa's been hearing things about him, too."

Dakin circled about the tree and watched with interest the descent of the little man. The big boarder's cigarette tip brightened and dimmed. In the half dark it was like a funny silhouette movie, Sarah thought. As he neared the ground she heard the rip of stitches and the faint thud of something which fell.

"There goes the pocket I mended," she thought.

"Poor man! That bad Dakin!" She felt remorsefully around among the damp, cool leaves for whatever had dropped.

"Never mind, never mind," the little man was fairly stuttering. " 'Twa'nt anything. Say, kind of hold on to your dog, will you?"

As Sarah straightened to reach for Dakin, her fingers brushed something hard. They closed about a familiar worn surface. They caught on the rough edges of the hand-made wooden screw. "Why! Why, Pa!" then she heard the little man draw in his breath with a frightened gasp. Dakin growled. Sarah slipped her hand into her coat pocket. When Pa really got mad at anyone—and somehow he seemed to have found out something about Mr. White.

"Good night," Pa was saying. "That birch tree bends sort of easy. I'd kind of like to give it a chance to grow for a while. Best not roost in it any more."

Mr. Absalom White scuttled down the path into the darkness. Dakin's ears cocked toward the rustle of his steps in the leaves of the road.

"Guess he forgot what he'd come for," remarked the big boarder. "Dakin had him treed before I even saw him. And then I couldn't call him off. So I thought I'd better wait."

"Maybe was going to invite us to help fill up his furniture van for nothing," growled Pa. "Just as well he's leaving in the morning."

Sarah clutched at the hard lump in her pocket. In the warm dark going up her own path with a big figure stalking each side of her while Minnie plodded along behind, she felt strangely protected, at ease. She would tell them now, even how she would have put that broken-down piano in the place of her beautiful old desk. Pa certainly better keep an eye on her.

"Well, well," said the boarder, "I'm glad you didn't do that. If all you want is a piano that's gone to seed, I can get that for you all right."

"No," said Sarah firmly, "I'm going to keep my desk now."

"I would," said the boarder, "but if you want the boarding house piano for the winter, you can have that too. Just today Mrs. Cooke was saying that another winter in that closed house would finish it, and if she couldn't find someone to take it for her, she guessed she'd sell it."

"Oo-o-ooh!" moaned Sarah, grasping his hand, "don't let the missionary buy it! Don't let him! Run home quick and tell her I'll take such care of it——"

"But I don't want it," the voice beside her sounded puzzled. "What would I do——"

"Oh, you did say he was a dealer, Mr. White, you know! I guess I'll run right over," she whirled about and started down the path.

Angus McDonald's laugh boomed out. "You couldn't hire him to carry it off. He knows the difference between antiques and junk."

"That's more than I do," thought Sarah remorsefully as she led the way into the living room and lighted the little princess lamp on the table. Before she struck the match, she pushed down the window screen which was still open a few inches, and laid the knob in her pocket on her desk.

"Queer it happened to be just what he wanted." The lamplight flickered over the hole where the screw fitted, gaping like a drawn tooth. "My, I'm glad Dakin stopped him." She spoke aloud then, "I'd be pleased if you'd stay to supper, Mr. McDonald. I can warm up some beans in a jiffy and slice some tomatoes—" her voice trailed back from the kitchen where she was already flying about.

"Oh, I say, I'd like to! You sure you want me? I'll tell you—" the big boarder sounded much pleased, "while Mr. Thurston puts the horse up,

and you warm the beans, I'll fix this loose knob for you. I'm grand at mending furniture."

"All right, that will be fine. Are you," she paused with a ripe tomato in each hand—"are you in the furniture business too?"

Angus McDonald was already whittling at the surface of the hole with his jack knife. Dakin sat close beside and watched.

"Me? No, oh, no," he said absently. "No, I'm a missionary."

Sarah set the tomatoes down on the kitchen table. "Now did you ever!" she reflected. "Did you ever!" She picked one up and began to cut it into thick red slices. "Queer about Dakin," she thought. She looked through the door at the intent pair by her desk. "How he knows the real thing when he sees it! I wish I could tell, too."

MUSIC
HATH CHARMS

Chapter VIII

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

THE piano had taken possession of the old living room and of Sarah. It stood there in the corner, dark and quiet, with a waiting air. It filled Sarah's thoughts in the same way, possessively. Always she felt it waiting for her to break its quiet. But it was there! That was something!

The transportation from the boarding house had been accomplished with some difficulty. Pa backed Minnie in the hay cart up against the door. Then he went into the house and looked the clumsy square piano over. Sarah hovered about, flaming with excitement. She and Pa gave it a tentative shove. It settled more stolidly into the old rag carpet.

"Got to have help," pronounced Pa.

Sarah whirled on her heels and raced out the road. On the way over she remembered that they had passed half a dozen of the neighbors working off their taxes by mending the road.

" 'Lo Sarah," Mr. Butts leaned on his shovel. "Boarding house afire?"

Sarah tossed him a breathless grin. "No, it's the piano. She won't move."

"You don't say so!" Mr. Butts looked interested. "Kinda queer of her, ain't it?"

"Pa's likely to strain his back," beseeched Sarah.

"I s'pose that's so," considered Mr. Butts, "and then we'd have to cut his winter's wood for him. Well, come on, fellers!" And the procession moved up to the boarding house.

Everybody in the village knew that Sarah was to keep the boarding house piano for the winter. Another season of fog in a closed house would be its ruin, Mrs. Cooke had said. Almost everyone but Sarah thought that it would be no great loss. To Sarah the offer was incredible. She could hardly wait for the last boarder to go away before she called for the piano.

"Mrs. Cooke might change her mind," she told Pa feverishly.

"Save me a lot of trouble," grumbled Pa, but Sarah knew how Pa really felt about it.

The six men and Pa groaned a great deal before the bulky load was stowed on the hay cart. One leg dropped off when they lifted it, but Sarah

tucked it under the vacant corner where it settled back into place. Dakin had to be tied to the apple-tree until Minnie was ready to start. He had caught enough of Sarah's excitement to become quite unmanageable.

"I don't mind picking up a piano," explained Mr. Butts, "but I'd kind of hate to fall over the dog while I was under it. Jest tie him up, Sarah."

The men rode over on the hay cart, Dakin cavorting alongside, and set the piano up in the living room. Then they all sat down.

"Now play us a tune, Sarah," invited Mr. Butts.

The scarlet flared up into Sarah's cheeks. "Oh, if I only could!" she thought. "They think it's that easy!"

"I'll tell you," she said, "I've got a pan of hot gingerbread and I can make a pot of coffee in two shakes of a lamb's tail. How about that?"

"She's a smart girl, Thurston," they said when Sarah had gone to the kitchen.

"She does pretty well," deliberated Pa, but his eyes glowed under his bushy eyebrows.

Now that the piano was established, Sarah didn't know quite what to do with it. She knew of course what she wanted to do with it; she wanted to play on it. She wanted to weave to-

gether some of the lovely inchoate shreds of sound which beat confusedly within her into an orderly fabric of real music. But the piano stayed inarticulate. She did not know how to make it speak.

Scarcely a neighbor came in without demanding a tune. Sarah wished passionately to comply but "Oh, Pa!" she mourned, her bright head bent over the keys in complete discouragement, "how can you play when you don't know one note from another."

"Never mind," consoled Pa, "Dakin's learning to sing and that's worth something."

Sarah straightened up. No use worrying Pa. She cast a wicked eye at Dakin asleep by the fire. Then boom, boom, te-boom, she struck a triad of deep chords which she had picked out in rhythmic succession. Up came Dakin's head. He turned suffering eyes toward the piano, lifted his nose, and howled a high soprano wail.

"Sing, Dakin, sing," moaned Sarah in a minor key.

Dakin rose, threw back his head and blew a long siren that drowned his accompaniment. On a top note, his voice shattered and fell. He sat down and looked reproachfully at Sarah.

"Don't laugh, Pa," she warned, her back

toward the unhappy dog. Pa had disappeared behind the *Bangor Daily News.*

"Nice Dakin!" she praised him. "He could sing a loud song! Good boy!"

Dakin wagged a doubtful tail and lay down to finish his nap.

"Play the thing Johnnie taught you on the harmonica," urged Pa. "It sounds nice when you pick it out on the piano."

Painfully with one finger Sarah extracted from the piano the Italian boat-song. Dakin opened one eye. Then she got her harmonica from behind the clock and blew the sweet, sure strains. Dakin rose and went out by the kitchen stove.

The next day Sarah made up her mind. "It can do no harm," she decided, "and I've got to do something about it."

On her way home from school, she halted in front of Miss Jennie Burns' little white house. Then she stooped, tucked in her shoe string, and walked briskly along. After a few rods her steps slowed. She stopped again, stared out over the blue fall bay. "Oh, my!" she thought, "it must be awful to be a book agent!" She turned resolutely on her heel. This time she marched up the path to Miss Burns' door. When she heard the quick little shuffle of Miss Jennie's feet, she

stepped back and half turned down the path. The door opened.

"Oh, good afternoon, Miss Jennie," Sarah jumped forward on the step so suddenly that Miss Burns backed away. "Oh, good after—why, how nice your dahlias are lasting." Sarah gazed intently at the long double row of henna flowers.

Miss Burns came out on the step. "How do you do, Sarah!" She looked up into the girl's embarrassed face. "Yes, they do look nice, the frost's so late this fall. Now don't you want a few to take home with you?"

"Oh, no, thank you! Oh, yes, I mean! That is, I'll tell you, Miss Jennie——"

Miss Burns led the way into her small parlor where Sarah's eyes fell on the upright piano in the corner. She began at once.

"It's this, Miss Jennie. If I had just a few music lessons so I could tell how to read the notes, then if I worked hard enough, maybe I could play a little." She paused. "But now I don't know how to begin," she finished simply.

"Well, that's all right, Sarah. One of my pupils is just stopping next week. I could take you on in her place."

Sarah burned in deeper embarrassment. "Thank you, Miss Jennie," she said, "but I just can't do

it unless there is something I can do to pay for it. You wouldn't—you wouldn't want your dishes washed, would you? I could stop in every afternoon on my way from school."

Miss Jennie meditated. Sarah stared at her shoes.

"I don't have many dishes," she said at last. "You see there's only one of me and I don't eat much."

Sarah rose. "I *wish* I hadn't asked," she thought bitterly. "What would Pa say?"

"Now sit down, Sarah. There is something I do want done but I don't know as you'd like to do it, a young girl like you."

"Oh, try me, Miss Jennie! I'll do anything," Sarah was herself again, eager, confident.

"Well, I just hate washing and ironing. If you'd do my wash each week, Sarah—it's awful small—I'd give you music lessons till the cows come home! There now, I just know I shouldn't have asked you."

Sarah laughed. "I can run down here Saturdays after I get my own clothes out," she cried. "I'd love to do it."

"Why, Sarah, would you really?" Miss Burns' middle-aged face lit up too. "Then you could stay

to dinner with me here, and I'd give you a nice long lesson in the afternoon."

Sarah went home on wings. It never seemed to occur to her that a Saturday spent on two washings and a music lesson was not exactly a holiday. Pa thought of it, but held his peace when he saw Sarah's content. He managed to be around about the time the clothes were ready to hang out and take in. And he insisted that he liked his clothes rough-dried. "Don't iron the good smell of the sun and air out of them," he commanded. And Sarah obeyed.

At odd moments she practiced. While supper was cooking, a few minutes before starting to school, evenings while poor Pa and Dakin churned restlessly before the fire. Sometimes when Pa had lighted her lamp and wound the clock, she would strike the deep rhythmic boom, boom, te-boom of Dakin's chords. Always he rose, and they had what Sarah called his bedtime song. Pa enjoyed it, and Dakin was praised so highly for the performance that he seemed reconciled to his sufferings.

Miss Jennie Burns was the sort of teacher who was not averse to giving a piece to a pupil as soon as she showed progress. "Kind of encourages them," she always said.

The Saturday before Thanksgiving Sarah was a little late. The cránberry sauce which she cooked ahead of time was slow to jell, she had torn a sheet in the wringer. She flew along the road thrusting her hands deep into her pockets to keep them from getting too chapped and stiff. Her fingers tapped the exercises out on her pocket linings.

Miss Burns was giving a lesson in the little parlor and Sarah could hear clumsy hands stumble among the keys while Miss Jennie patiently counted one, two, three. The washing was small and out on the line, snowy white, when Miss Jennie came wearily into the kitchen.

"I declare, Sarah," she sighed, "if I didn't have somebody like you to teach now and then, I'd give it up as a bad job. Most of them do their practicing after they get here."

Sarah set the flatirons forward on the stove. "It's a shame," she sympathized. "Don't you feel too tired, maybe, to give me a lesson this afternoon?" She held her flatiron poised in the air while she waited for the answer.

"Bless you, no," said Miss Jennie, "it's a real rest to give you a lesson. I've got something nice for you this afternoon, too."

Sarah set the iron down with a crash that made

Miss Jennie jump. "You don't mean a piece, Miss Jennie? Not a real piece?"

Miss Jennie nodded. "And if you get so's you can play it real well, I'm going to recommend you for the Sunday School entertainment next month. I always send two pupils."

That afternoon, about four o'clock, Sarah marched solemnly up the road with a fresh white piece of sheet music held carefully by her side. Every now and then she lifted it and read the title on the outside, "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton." Miss Jennie had played it for her. She would practice her fingers off, she thought fiercely, until she could play it like that, or at least enough like that to be in the entertainment. Wouldn't Pa be proud!

Pa *was* proud. He knew what that place in the entertainment had cost Sarah when he drove her down to the Town Hall the night of the concert.

"Now don't you get nervous," he warned her, "there ain't a mite of need of it. You play that piece as if you'd made it up yourself."

Sarah squeezed Pa's arm. "I do feel as if I could hear that Sweet Afton river just flowing along. I hope I can make the rest of 'em hear it."

"I will," promised Pa loyally, "I can just hear it now."

So he could, thought Sarah ruefully. Poor Pa

hadn't heard anything else for three weeks. Dakin too, but Dakin nó longer minded anything except his bedtime song, and Sarah thought he got a certain amount of satisfaction out of that along with his pain. At least he swaggered a good deal after a specially successful performance.

"Oh, my! speaking of angels! If there isn't Dakin now, over there by the hall steps! He must have sneaked out the cellar way when I was putting the pie away. Now, Pa, what'll we do with him. It's too cold to leave him out!"

Pa chuckled. "Put him in the dressing room," he suggested. "Everybody knows him. And he'll keep you from getting so nervous. Think about him for a while."

So Sarah hustled Dakin into the dressing room where he lay down obediently under the table. He even submitted to being tied to a chair leg. Dakin always knew when he had gone far enough.

Sarah peeked out through the crack of the curtains at the audience. Rows and rows of children on the floor benches way back to the door. A tiny lighted tree stood in the corner as a reminder that the proceeds were for presents for the poor. Up in the gallery the grown folks. Every seat was full and children were standing. Cold shivers prickled up and down Sarah's spine.

"It's good it's a short entertainment," she thought. "Nobody could keep those children still very long."

Sarah's turn was last on the program. She sat quietly beside Dakin waiting. Waiting for a chance to touch those magic keys and turn their silence into the music which was somewhere in her. She knew a little about how to do it now, it was almost too wonderful, she had begun at last to find out something about those secret and devious ways of music, just enough to know how much she had to learn. Sarah rested her hand on Dakin's head. It kept her fingers from trembling. Pa was right. Dakin watched her with steady brown eyes. "He knows how I feel," Sarah thought.

She did not hear the clatter about her. When anyone spoke to her she answered from a long way off. She and Dakin seemed enclosed in a transparent bubble where they could look out at the chattering people but no one could get in to disturb them. The music of her piece going slowly through her head was all she heard. The nerves of her fingers seemed to touch the notes though her hands lay still.

At last the bubble broke. "Come on, Sarah, your turn!" Sarah leaped to her feet, Dakin at

her side, "No, no, you can't come, you stay here! Lie down, Dakin!" Sarah's teeth were fairly chattering. Dakin, puzzled, excited, started forward but the chair leg and Sarah's voice brought him to terms. He lay down again.

Sarah grasped her piece of music and moved automatically out on the platform. The clear red of her cheeks had drained away as white as her little old dress. Only her gleaming hair and her jade-blue eyes kept the vivid color that usually meant Sarah.

She spread her music out and slipped on to the piano stool. She had meant to twirl it around, the way performers always did before they seated themselves, but now she wanted only to sit down. The notes blurred before her eyes. Still like an automaton she felt for the first chord. Then a curious thing happened, with the sound of the first notes, all of her confidence came back! "I can do it! I can do it!" she exulted, "oh, won't Pa be proud!"

The first page done! why, what fun it was! and everybody was listening so carefully. So carefully that Sarah felt a little annoyed at a sudden movement from the group of boys standing near the small candled tree. She wished they'd keep their hands off it until she had finished.

A quick flare beat under her eyelids and she lifted them to see a fallen candle flame up in the pile of paper strips at the base. In an instant a stroke of a damp mitten had smothered the blaze, but one of the boys had shouted "Fire!" and run. The damage was done.

The quiet hall shifted into a mass of screaming fighting children. Benches clattered as boys leaped from one to the other. From the gallery parents shouted, "Sit down! Sit down!" and then ran themselves to the stairs! Sarah, on her feet at the edge of the platform tried to make herself heard. "It's all right! It's all right!" She saw little Mary Butts sprawl in the aisle and a big boy step on the small hand. That scream! Sarah felt sick.

"What'll I do! What'll I do!" she cried frantically. She sprang back to the piano, remembering how panics were stopped by performers going on. No one could hear her piece! She struck the keys harder and harder. It was no use! Desperately she thumped Boom, boom, te-boom. She must make herself heard!

Instantly with a clatter and a rush Dakin was on the platform, chair dragging behind him, barking like a mad dog. Then the panic broke into a real stampede.

"Be still, Dakin!" screamed Sarah. "You make

them worse! Oh, Dakin—" she flung herself at the keys—Boom, boom, te-boom. "Sing, Dakin," she moaned. "Sing! Sing!"

Dakin withstood her for a moment. Then he stopped barking and began a low whine.

"Louder!" moaned Sarah. "Louder, Dakin! Sing, Sing! Sing!"

Now Dakin was well started. He flung up his head and from his throat came the siren note that cut through all the human noise. The children heard it. They all knew about Dakin's song. Boom, boom, te-boom. "Sing! Dakin, Sing!" They were slowing up. "Louder, Dakin! Louder!"

Someone had turned and seen him. "Look, look!" Sarah heard the voices. "Keep still. Dakin's singing!"

In almost as quick a time as the panic had begun it was ended. Children were crowding back to the platform. Parents had the little ones in their arms. Little Mary Butts sat in her mother's lap, laughing at Dakin while long gusty sobs still shook her.

Sarah stopped. "You must all sit down," she commanded, "or Dakin will not finish his bedtime song."

They sat down. Dakin like a real performer be-

tween acts was stalking up and down the stage dragging the chair after him. In quick revulsion of feeling the children burst into hysterical laughter. Sarah put her finger on her lips. They quieted.

"Now, Dakin!" Poor Dakin lifted suffering eyes. Had he not done his share? "Once more," whispered Sarah. She felt sudden tears at his patient uplifted look. Boom, boom, te-boom. She thought they would never let him stop.

And then it was all over. She and Dakin had escaped from grateful parents and delighted children. They were driving home through the quiet night. Sarah listened to the silence. She thought she should always hear that horrid inhuman screaming. She felt so tired that she could scarcely sit up. Her sheet music lay crumpled on her lap. She didn't care about it now. Nobody cared about it. It was Dakin they had applauded and wanted to hear over and over again. Nobody had even asked her to finish her piece. Well, it was Dakin who had stopped the stampede. All her playing had had no effect. She shuddered. How those noises rang in her ears!

"Well, daughter," Pa sounded husky, "guess if it hadn't been for you, there'd be some pretty sad homes tonight."

"Not me, Pa. Dakin." Sarah's voice came faintly.

"Well, who knew enough to set Dakin off, I'd like to know! Not many girls would 'a' thought of it."

Sarah glowed at his praise. Pa always meant what he said. Clop, clop, went Minnie's hoofs. Dakin was running far ahead. The night was healing with its quiet.

In the living room the lamp shone softly on the piano in the corner. Sarah turned away from it and pulled her things off wearily. Pa came in from the barn just as she was tucking her sheet music out of sight under the cover. He sat down by the fire. He looked at her uncertainly. Then he cleared his throat.

"You wouldn't like to play for me, would you, Sarah, before I go to bed?"

Sarah suddenly choked. Something bright and wet dropped on the sheet of music as it came out from cover. "Course I would, Pa."

Flow Gently, Sweet Afton, how smoothly it flowed under her fingers! Sarah could see Pa lean back in content. Dakin sat up and watched her attentively. After all this was the audience she wanted most. Music wasn't just for applause, and

none of that hard work was wasted. She finished the last note softly.

"Guess we won't ask Dakin for his bedtime song tonight," she said. "He's done his share."

DAKIN SLEEPS OUT

"GOT AN OUTDOOR SANITARIUM?"

Chapter IX

DAKIN SLEEPS OUT

"WELL, I hope you get enough fresh air out here." Pa swung the Gloucester hammock up by its chains and looked protestingly back at the distance to the house.

Sarah's strong young arms tossed the mattress into place. "Now, Pa, you want to keep me healthy, don't you?"

"I don't know what you'd do with any more health, Sarah." Pa grinned reluctantly back at Sarah's glowing face. "I guess you'd manage to keep up and round if you slept on the porch in this contraption instead of out here next the woods. Hullo, here's Bobby. Just the boy I wanted to see."

Sarah scowled at Bobby's fat figure crossing the field. "Now listen to him ask questions." She seized a pile of bed clothes and with deft hands clapped sheets and blankets into place. Dakin

rose, stretched, and walked over to a distant tree where he flung himself down with a thump.

"Well, what now?" called out Bobby. "Got an outdoor sanitarium?"

Sarah turned a forbidding back.

"Good morning, Mr. Thurston." Bobby was always polite to Pa.

"Morning, Bobby. Say, I was wondering how you'd like to drive over with me Sunday to see the State Commissioner of Agriculture. I got an appointment with him about that alfafa experiment of mine, and I hear he's specially interested in the Berkshire breed of pigs you're raising."

Bobby visibly swelled. "You bet I would, Mr. Thurston. Much obliged. Sure thing! Sure thing!" His eye fell on Sarah, who had straightened up and was watching her father with eager eyes. "You going, Sarah?"

" 'Fraid I can't get you both in the buggy." Pa shook his head regretfully. "Bobby's kind of roomy, you know." He strolled off toward the barn. "Anyway Sarah wouldn't care about all that farm talk."

Bobby bore the reference to his width. Not often was the advantage his. "Too bad," he commiserated, "but you can take a nap in your hospital bed. Say, where'd you get it?"

Sarah would allow no shadow of chagrin to give Bobby pleasure.

"Boarder left it with me," she answered sweetly. "I'm to use it as long as I like and then store it for the winter."

"You ain't going to sleep out here nights?"

"I am." Sarah turned the edge of the sheet over and stood the pillow up invitingly. "Any reason why not?"

"Mosquitoes."

"She left me a net."

"Rain."

"Canvas cover goes with it."

Bobby stared enviously at the complete outfit. "Bet you'll be good and scared when you get out here alone in the dark. You'll go hot-footing it into the house."

"Is that so? Come on, Dakin." Sarah whistled to the big collie who stalked past Bobby with unseeing eye. "I guess Dakin will see that the bears don't eat me."

"He going to sleep out, too?" called Bobby after her.

"He is," said Sarah without turning her head.

"Well, you'll have a nice time with him." Bobby's voice cracked into adolescent shrillness as he raised it, and Sarah laughed cruelly.

But she had reason to remember Bobby's prophecy that night. Dakin had trailed sleepily out after her through the damp August dew over to the apple-trees where the hammock hung like a pale tent in the gloom. Sarah spread a rug under the hammock, and Dakin crawled into his bed with a protesting grunt. Sarah pulled his old comforter over him and then shivered down into the cold sheets of her outdoor bed.

"I'll take a hot brick tomorrow night," she promised herself. "My, who'd think it would be so much colder than in the house!"

For a long time she lay awake listening to the soft rustlings in the trees. Over the wall in the woods she heard the cautious movement of some little animal, but when she sat up in bed, the movement stopped and only a sleepy Peabody bird whistled part of his song. "I wish I had a flashlight," she thought. "I certainly would like to see some of these little fellows out walking nights." Dakin stirred and she lay down again. But she could not go to sleep. The night about was too full of mysterious life. It seemed pressing against her, quiet, thick, dark.

She felt that she had hardly closed her eyes when a sudden jar shook her bed and the whole night was shattered by Dakin's furious barks.

Sarah sat up in bed, her heart thumping. The late old moon had risen, and in its pale light Dakin was tearing back and forth across the meadow. Sarah rose and pulled on her bathrobe, clammy now with dew. She knew Dakin of old.

"Nothing under the sun but a moon shadow," she grumbled, "but once he gets Pa awake, back we go to the house."

Dakin, a little sheepish over his false alarm, permitted himself to be dragged back to his subterranean bed. But the moon had risen and, as ever, it filled him with strange premonitions. Each time that Sarah drifted down the pleasant ways of sleep, she was jarred into startled erectness by Dakin's attack on a leaf-blown shrub or a clump of waving grass.

In the morning Pa inquired genially about her first night out of doors. Sarah raised haggard but honest eyes.

"I got lots of fresh air and not much else," she admitted. "Dakin's not a sound sleeper after the moon rises. If he hears an ant wiggle her feelers, he runs and hollers to her to stop. Guess I'll tie him tonight."

Bobby also was interested in the outcome of the first night's trial. He hung around the kitchen where Sarah was washing his mother's dishes, al-

though he usually disappeared promptly for fear Sarah might ask him to do something.

"I told you how it would be. And you wait," he went on darkly, "the porcupines are all around now. And once he chases them!"

Sarah shuddered. She remembered too well poor Dakin's encounter with a porcupine when he was a puppy, and how she had pulled the ugly spines from his nose with a pair of forceps.

"Just let a spine break off," Bobby went on, "and the barbs will work it right into a dog's brain. Many a good dog killed that way."

Sarah's vulnerable spot was Dakin. "P'raps I'd better leave him in the house," she murmured to herself.

Bobby backed out of the kitchen. "You bet I would," he agreed heartily, "if I had a good dog like that."

That night when Sarah collected her hot brick and extra blanket, Dakin rose and stood eagerly awaiting her at the door.

"Mm," said Sarah, "had a good time last night and want to do it some more, don't you? Well, it's the woodshed and a good night's sleep for you, my boy."

Dakin was amazed and disconcerted when Sarah actually shut the door and left him on the

wrong side. He burst into a kind of puppy yelp which he saved for just such occasions. Sarah wavered at the edge of the porch. Then she heard Pa's voice, firm and deep. The yelp subsided into an injured whine, and then there was silence. Sarah moved on across the wet grass.

"Seems kind of lonesome without him out here," she thought, hugging her hot brick and staring out at the black pines. "But my! I guess I'll sleep tonight if I ever did!"

The wind blew the hammock gently and set the leaves into a kind of conversational murmur. Sarah breathed deeply of the sweet clean air. Then her breaths grew longer and she was off into the sleep of tired youth.

It seemed a long time later when she was dragged back into consciousness by moans which ran in and out of her dreams. "Dakin's at it again," she muttered. "Mustn't let him wake Pa up." The moans came now in a monotone, nearer, deeper. Sarah suddenly crouched under the blankets. She was wide awake and she realized that Dakin was in the house while the moans were just over the wall in the woods. Her heart gave a queer leap and then seemed to turn over.

The moon, still later and paler than the night before, was shining over the meadow, but no rays

could get into the dark aisles of trees. Yet as Sarah watched, stiff and motionless, she thought she saw a glimmer of light in the direction of the moans. The light wavered and went out. The moans died down into sighs. There was silence.

Sarah measured the distance to the house. "I don't know as I can run even if I try," she thought, "but I guess I'll try."

Just then the moans burst out again, nearer, with a weird kind of broken note running through them. Directly over the wall, the light brightened slowly and Sarah's horrified eyes saw a white shape sway between the dark tree trunks. She felt herself grow clammy and cold as if the night dew had settled all over her body. She knew that she could not run now. It was like a frightful nightmare where she could not even scream.

Back and forth swayed the ghostly figure. Suddenly the moan broke into a high falsetto. Sarah drew a deep breath. She felt the warm blood flow back into hands and feet. Then a surge of hot anger shook the last trace of fear from her frozen brain. For a moment her muscles were tense with their desire to spring. She pushed her clenched fists into the mattress. "Stay here," she said to herself. "Stay here. Stay here." Without a sound she lay watching the light flare up through the

white figure, and darken as it moved moaning away through the woods. "To think I nearly did hot-foot it into the house!" she murmured. "Disgraced for life, I'd have been!" Then she tucked her hand under her cheek and fell soundly asleep.

"Well, how'd it go last night?" inquired Bobby through the screen door as Sarah finished scouring the frying pan.

Sarah's fingers clenched the handle and the pan made a queer swing in Bobby's direction. Sarah set it on the stove carefully, as if it had been made of glass.

"Fine!" she answered cordially. "Just fine! That was good advice you gave me. Dakin whimpered a little when he had to stay in the woodshed. But my! What a night's sleep I had!" She drew a long retrospective sigh. She smiled pleasantly at Bobby's face, to which the checkered screen gave a queer expression.

"You a pretty good sleeper?" asked Bobby feebly.

"I should say I am. Just give me half a chance." Sarah picked the pan up firmly now and hung it on its hook. "Yes, sir, that's a fine arrangement. No worry about porcupines or anything. Much obliged, Bobby."

"Don't mention it." Bobby slid away down the steps.

"Oh, Bobby," called Sarah after him, "Pa says to be over at the house at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. The commissioner has asked him to stay to Sunday dinner and he's going to bring you too."

Bobby's round face beamed delightedly in at Sarah an instant. "Gosh! I bet it'll be a good dinner." He strutted down the path. "Too bad you have to stay at home," he called back. "But then you can always take a nap in your hospital bed."

"You may like to borrow it yourself about then," muttered Sarah with a vindictive jab at the stove polish.

That night when she was ready to go out to the hammock bed she remarked casually to Pa, "Guess I'll take Dakin along with me tonight."

Pa glanced shrewdly at her over his newspaper. "Too much sleep last night?" he asked.

"Yes," said Sarah gravely. "I feel as if I couldn't close an eye tonight, and since it's cloudy I guess Dakin'll get along all right." She held out her arm from which dangled a coil of clothes line. "But I'll tie him to be on the safe side."

Dakin, who was always subdued by the humiliation of a rope, crept under the hammock to his

rug and went promptly to sleep. Sarah listened to his deep breathing and now and then reached over to touch his soft coat. It was a comfort to have him there. "The ghost will walk early tonight," she thought wisely. "Too much business on hand tomorrow to keep up such late hours."

Sarah lay quietly waiting. "I'm going to enjoy this place quite a lot after it stops being haunted," she thought. "I hadn't any idea the night was like this outdoors." The sky hung low over her with a heavy soft gloom. She heard a few sprinkles on her roof. "Better hurry," she chuckled. "Water's not good for ghosts."

Yet in spite of her expectation, when she heard a faint moan off in those black woods, her skin prickled as if she had touched an electric wire. She waited until she saw a pale light before she stirred. Then she moved her arm softly over the edge of the bed and slipped the knot in Dakin's clothes line. Dakin woke at her touch and nosed at her hand. She closed it gently over his mouth. "Quiet, Dakin," she whispered. "Wait."

She knew when Dakin caught the sense of something strange in the woods by the sudden lift of his ears. "Better let him stand here beside me," she thought, "he makes such a fuss getting himself out." When she twitched at Dakin's collar,

he seemed to understand, and pulled himself forward until he could stand erect. Sarah could feel his hair rise along his back but he stood quietly beside her, obedient to her whisper. "He *is* a good dog," she thought. "Bobby and I agree for once."

The moaning grew louder and the light brightened and darkened through the trees. "Perhaps I'd better not wait for him to get too near." She felt the dog quiver under her hand. "I'd hate to have Dakin kill him."

With one arm she pulled her bathrobe around her and thrust on her slippers. Then she released the dog's nose. "Go it, Dakin," she cried. "Catch him!"

At the sound of her voice and the plunge of the dog the deep groan of the ghost broke into a high scream. Sarah, over the wall almost as soon as Dakin, heard a crash of branches as some very unghostly body pushed its way through the brush. The light dashed to the ground. Another sharp scream and then a tearing sound. Sarah was thoroughly frightened now. Her swift clear whistle rang through the woods. "Dakin! Come here!" she commanded. "Dakin! At once!" Silence. Then she heard the dog brushing through the leaves toward her. In the faint gloom she could see something white dangling from his mouth.

Sarah's fingers trembled as she detached it from his teeth. She straightened up and listened. Cautious steps were making off toward the road. Her hand gripped Dakin's collar as he made a quick motion toward them.

"Enough, Dakin! Enough for tonight!" Her foot brushed something hard and she reached down to pick up a flash-light from the moss. When she pressed the knob, the light flared up. She examined Dakin's trophy, and laughed wickedly. "You did a very good job, my boy." She patted his straining head. "Now let's go back to bed. It's really raining now."

Dakin cared little for the rain. He had had a taste of sport, and he had no mind to go tamely back under Sarah's hammock. "All right. I'll take you into the house then," she threatened. But she suddenly knew that she wouldn't; that without Dakin near she had no desire to sleep out under the trees.

As if Dakin understood her predicament and laughed at her, he suddenly stopped resisting her and pounced like a playful puppy up on her bed. "I shall stay here," his shining yellow eyes said, "and there isn't a thing you can do about it."

Sarah didn't try. She curled herself into the space which he left. "All right for tonight," she

conceded. "It might be a little damp under the bed in the rain."

She relaxed in the reassurance of the warm bulk of his body at her feet. On the roof of her tent the rain pattered in earnest now. Sarah tucked a piece of white sheet cloth carefully under her pillow and smiled into the darkness. "I declare, Dakin," she murmured, "you are the smartest dog I ever heard of. There isn't a police dog that could touch you!"

Dakin's tail gave a sleepy thump on the quilt. He heaved a deep doggy sigh and lay quite still. The patters of the rain seemed to run together into an indeterminate slipping, slipping sound. Sarah felt herself sliding away on it, off, off— The woods were quite still now.

Sunday morning came in with long dashes of golden sunshine over the wet grass. A clearing sky broke into patches of blue. Sarah's feet danced through the dripping clover into the house. "How I shall enjoy that ride!" Her mouth was a wilful mischievous red line. "I've half a mind to take you along, too, Dakin. You've earned it."

Dakin was dashing about the field chasing the swallows who swept daringly under his very nose. The day fairly leapt into motion and light. "Just

the kind of weather to have a good time in," Sarah thought.

Sunday mornings Pa took an extra nap. When he came into the kitchen, Sarah whisked the platter of bacon and eggs on to the table. Fresh as a rose she stood waiting for him, her long blue apron buttoned snugly over her clean linen dress.

"My, you're all dressed up this morning," admired Pa. "Going to church?"

"Well, no, I don't know as I am." Sarah had an unchurchly gleam in her eye.

Pa looked at her thoughtfully over the plate of bacon. "Seemed to me I heard a good deal of a racket last night. I was 'most too tired to wake up to it. But I kind of sensed Dakin was making a row." He lifted an inquiring eyebrow at Sarah.

Sarah laughed. She seemed in high spirits this morning. "Well, he did bark once," she admitted. "But he was a very good dog on the whole. I don't know but I'll take him along—" she stopped and laughed again. Better wait a bit before she announced that project.

"To church?" finished Pa.

"Well, no, not to church." Her eyes were full of mirth and she patted a bit of white cloth back into her apron pocket. "Now if here isn't Bobby coming up the path. He looks as anxious as if he

thought he was late." The idea seemed to amuse her. Dakin got up from the rug by the door and stalked off into the sitting room.

"Bobby's going to get a good deal out of this trip," remarked Pa. "It ain't often he gets treated like anything but a spoiled baby."

"Well, that's all he is," retorted Sarah sharply. A flare of anger replaced the mischief in her eyes.

Pa finished his coffee and went over to the little kitchen mirror where his clean collar and best tie awaited him. "Hullo, Bobby," he called out genially as the fat boy rapped on the screen door. "Got a good day after all, didn't we?"

Bobby slumped heavily into a chair by the table. He did look anxious. And a little pale as if he had not slept well. Sarah moved about the table piling the dishes capably and watching Bobby over them with swift clear glances that he refused to meet.

"How he shines!" she thought. "He certainly did polish himself off well. Best clothes, best shoes, best hat!" She set the cream pitcher down so sharply that a thick yellow plop flew out on the table-cloth. "Well, haven't I got my best things on, too?"

Bobby rubbed his feet together uneasily. "Yes,

it is a good day, Mr. Thurston. Cleared off about four o'clock real sudden."

Pa chuckled. "I remember how I used to wake up about every five minutes to watch the weather when I was a kid and going off anywhere."

Sarah darted an irritated glance at Pa's back. He needn't compare himself with Bobby. Pa wasn't that kind of a little boy. She felt in her pocket and drew out a folded piece of white cotton cloth.

"Did you remember to bring a clean handkerchief, Bobby?" Then she bit off her words. What made her say that? Those were the words that Pa always said to her when she was going off for a nice time. Yes, Pa recognized them.

"That's right, Sarah." His voice sounded warm. "Look out for the men folks."

Men folks! Bobby! Sarah watched him with implacable eyes as he unfolded the torn square. He was actually turning paler. Now he had it open. Sarah laid a finger on the black scribble in the corner. "Seems to be your mother's laundry mark," she observed. "I knew it from the dish towels." Ah, Bobby understood now. No need to explain any further. His day was finished. He knew Pa well enough to realize how stern he could be over such a cowardly trick to his girl.

Bobby's lips trembled and Sarah suddenly turned her back. Good enough for him, she kept repeating to herself. But if only he hadn't dressed up so! There was something touching in all that shining care from slovenly Bobby. Sarah looked over her shoulder and caught his beseeching round eyes. "Oh, my!" she thought desperately. "What a fool I am!"

She snatched the white cloth from his hand and thrust it into the stove. "Here," she said roughly, "that's no good. It's all torn. Let me get you one of Pa's."

She ran into the next room and pulled out the top drawer of the bureau. Slowly she drew out a clean folded square. Half unconsciously she touched it to her cheeks. Then she laughed a little and pulled out a dry one.

"Here you are, Bobby." She handed the handkerchief to him. "Now don't you lose it. And by the way," the wicked gleam came back into her eyes and she reached over to the window sill. "I guess you lost this too, didn't you, while you were out walking?"

Bobby took the flash-light and turned it over in his hand. His face was quite red now and his breath came hard. Then he thrust it toward Sarah.

"I wish you'd take this, Sarah," he said earnestly, keeping his eyes down on its silver tip. "You'll find it awful handy, sleeping out and everything."

Sarah's face softened. Her smile had something almost maternal in it. "Why, thank you, Bobby! That will be just fine. I can keep an eye on Dakin now if he gets to acting up nights."

When the two had gone, clopping off down the road in the sunshine with Dakin barking after them and straining at his collar to chase them, Sarah went back to the empty kitchen. She took off her clean linen dress and pulled on a jumper.

"Want to go clamming?" she asked Dakin, a little drearily.

She stepped to the window to fasten her tie under her collar. Suddenly she laughed again. And the laugh this time was young, with a kind of helpless mirth.

"My goodness, Dakin," she cried, "Pa saw that whole business in this mirror. And he never said a word." Her face grew thoughtful, tender. "He's always trying to help that Bobby to grow up, Pa is! And I'm just holding him back." She sighed repentantly and picked up the clam hod. "Well, you needn't strut around so, Dakin. You're as bad as I am. There's a pair of us!"

She put the silver-tipped flash-light carefully in the table drawer and with the big collie at her heels ran swiftly down the path toward the beach.

A FAIR EXCHANGE

SARAH AND ELSA

Chapter X

A FAIR EXCHANGE

"THEY'VE come," announce the postmaster to Sarah, who had stopped for her *Bangor Daily News.*

"Who?" asked Sarah.

"The Wops down in the Shore House."

"Wops?" Sarah always thought of Pa's old hired man, Dago Johnnie, when anyone said Wops. "Wops couldn't afford to live in the Shore House. Must be something else."

The postmaster passed Sarah a bunch of letters in silence. They were all addressed to Signor Rizzio, Shore House, and some of them had queer foreign stamps.

"I did all the business of renting the house to him. Ought to know. Says he's a famous musician. Guess he'd better be to pay that rent."

Sarah pricked up her ears. "What's he play?"

"Piano. Brought it all the way from New York." The postmaster thrust the letters back into the box. "My Lord, you ought to hear him! Just

walk down the beach some night, Sarah, if you want to hear a racket."

Sarah looked excited. "I certainly will. But he's no Wop if he's a famous musician."

"All Wops to me." The postmaster was final.

Sarah thrust the *News* into her school bag, roused Dakin, who was stretched on the step waiting for her, and strolled down the path which led to the shore.

"Just about time to make it before I get Pa's supper," she said. She tucked her bag and hat under a rock, whistled the dog, and sped up the beach. Dakin circled about her with frenzied barks and great curving leaps. The cool salt wind raced by her cheeks. She felt like one of the gulls swooping along the white edges of the waves.

Near the big house which overhung the rocks of the shore, Sarah stopped and quieted Dakin. They walked sedately past the house and sat down beyond it. Sarah flung her arm around the dog to keep him quiet. He might feel moved to sing if there were music. The late afternoon sun picked them out on the dark rocks; the bright red-gold of Sarah's hair, the collie's tawny coat.

Suddenly the music came, a great rush of brilliant notes tossed glittering out over the shining sea. Sarah felt herself go with it, winged, ecstatic.

She did not know how long she listened, but when Dakin whimpered and stirred, she came back into a silence. She breathed a long quivering sigh and stood up. Dakin was staring up at the knoll which jutted out overhead. As Sarah's eyes mechanically followed his, she saw a head dodge behind a rock. Too dazed by her first experience with real music, Sarah got a sense only of smooth light hair.

"Looked almost like a girl," she thought absently. "Dakin, we've got to go now, though I feel as if I could stay here forever just on the chance of hearing that music again."

Dakin raced ahead down the beach but Sarah followed more slowly this time. The intensity of her absorption seemed to shut her eyes and ears to anything outside of herself. When the French doors of the house suddenly swung open and a little man ran down the steps and faced her, Sarah could only look at him in a daze. Then she realized that his dark face was sharp with irritation.

"Are you aware," said the man in precise English, "that you are trespassing on my property?"

Sarah looked at him in amazement. Trespassing on the beach! Whoever heard of such a thing? Then she swallowed and was silent. After all,

it must have been his magic that made that music.

"Do not repeat your trespass," continued the irritated voice. "I can not have the natives of this village interfering with my privacy."

Sarah came out of her daze. What did he mean by speaking to her like that! Her red hair took fire. "Just how have I interfered with anybody's privacy?" she sputtered.

The man took a step toward her but Sarah stood her ground. As his anger increased, her temper steadied. "By crossing property which I have hired and paid for and which I intend to keep for my own purposes. And I shall see to it that my rights are not infringed upon. I am Signor Rizzio."

Sarah smiled provokingly down into the dark, heated face. "Better find out what your rights are, then, Signor Rizzio," she suggested. "Are *you* aware," her tones took on the precision of his own words, "that no property below the water line is owned by anybody?"

Sarah never found out what effect this piece of information had, because Dakin, noting the delay, had wheeled about and came tearing back along the beach. He halted beside Sarah and raised an inquiring ear at the stranger.

To Sarah's amazement the whole expression of the little man had changed. He no longer had any attention for Sarah and her sins. He was snapping his fingers, whistling, cajoling her dog.

"Hope he bites him," thought Sarah.

But Dakin, quite the contrary, seemed flattered and pleased. He sniffed at the long fingers and even rolled his eyes at the man in a sentimental little way which he usually reserved for Sarah.

"A beautiful dog!" he was running over Dakin rapidly with the sure eyes and hands of an expert. "Such points! Ah, what a dog! What a dog!"

"What a dog, I'd say!" thought Sarah. "Making up to strangers like this! Come, Dakin, we have to go home now." She turned on her heel.

"One moment." Again there was the sharp note of command in his voice. Sarah whirled in spite of herself. "Whose dog is this?"

"He's mine." Sarah was succinct.

"Yours! How did you come by such a dog?" Sarah did not feel it necessary to explain. "I will buy him of you," the man announced. "Dogs are my hobby. An artist must have a hobby. I have many wonderful collies in my kennels at home. You have his pedigree?"

Sarah's rage flamed out. "Yes, I have," she

said, "and I am going to keep it along with the dog."

"What is your price?" The man brushed aside her indignation.

"My dog is not for sale." Sarah was scarlet. "Why do you talk to me this way? I came up here to hear your music, and if that is trespassing I am glad I did it. But how can anyone who makes such beautiful music—" she was trembling now —"how can he be so *mean?*"

For the first time Signor Rizzio looked at her as if he really saw her. He even loosed his fingers from Dakin's collar. "Well, really!" he gasped. "Well, really!" Then as Sarah struggled for control, "Do you like music?" he added curiously.

Sarah nodded.

"Very well," said the little man pompously. "If you come very quietly past here and sit where I cannot see or hear you, I do not mind if you listen now and then. But," he added, craftily, "be sure that you bring the dog."

Sarah swallowed her pride. She might hear again that magic of sound. "I will," she promised. "Though a lot of good it will do you if you neither see nor hear him," she finished to herself.

She fled down the beach, Dakin racing ahead

of her. Pa would get no supper if she didn't hurry. What music! What music! And what a queer little man! How could Dakin like him? Maybe the dog got the magic that made the music. It must be in him somewhere. "I'll just keep out of his way," resolved Sarah, "and listen to him. Then I'll forget how mean he is."

The next day at the head of the lane Sarah stood and swung her bag indecisively. "He said now and then," she debated, "and that was only yesterday. But he's so queer that if I don't go now, there might not be any then. Perhaps I can get by without his seeing me, anyway." She looked uneasily at Dakin. "I've a good mind to send him home. Still, I suppose I can't. He made me promise. Oh, well, come along, Dakin. Only for goodness' sake, don't let that Rizzio man see you."

She hardly knew why she was so anxious to keep Dakin away from the musician. Twice she hesitated on her way down the lane, and would have turned back if she had not remembered so clearly the little man's music.

The house was silent as she passed, walking swiftly at the tide's edge with Dakin between her and the water as if she would shelter him from prying eyes. Under the overhanging rocks she sat

again, and waited. Only silence from the house. Dakin grew uneasy and began to nose about among the brush. Sarah paid little attention to him so long as he kept on the side away from the house. She was absorbed in her waiting.

Suddenly, from almost over her head, she heard a faint scream. Then a frightened, "Avanti! Avanti!" She scrambled up the knoll and at the top found Dakin facing a scared-looking girl. Dakin had his inquiring ear up and his tail was waving in his most friendly fashion, but the girl had backed against a tree trunk, and fingers pressed on her lips, was watching him with terrified stare.

Without lifting her eyes she called out a flood of words of which Sarah recognized enough Italian to know that she was begging mercy from the dog.

"For goodness' sake," said Sarah, "that dog wouldn't hurt a flea. Stop hollering."

The girl stopped and the two exchanged long scrutinizing looks. Sarah's heart melted when she saw that the girl was really shaking with fear. "About as old as I am," she decided with the quick summary of youth. "Can't belong to that Rizzio man, she's so light. Might be a German maid only she doesn't look like a maid."

Sarah sat down sociably on the grass and pulled Dakin across her lap. The girl perched on a rock a safe distance away. As she smoothed her yellow hair, Sarah noticed that her hands still trembled.

"Guess you can't be any relation to Signor Rizzio, he's so fond of dogs," began Sarah tentatively. "Do you speak English?"

"Yes, I do," replied the girl with the precise enunciation which Sarah had noticed the night before. "He's my father."

"You don't say so!" Sarah shot an amazed glance at the round, blonde face which seemed to shrink away from her scrutiny. Sarah ran her fingers through her own shining hair. "But of course Pa didn't have to have red hair just because I did."

The girl seemed a little more at ease. "I am like my mother who was from Tyrol," she said. "I think that you have the prettiest hair I ever saw."

"Oh, no!" protested Sarah, flushed.

The girl seemed to gather equanimity from Sarah's embarrassment. "And I wish I had red hair too. Then perhaps I would dare to speak to my father as you did."

"Oh, my goodness!" Sarah was scarlet now.

"Did you hear me? I don't know what possessed me. When he can play like that, too! But he did make me so mad!"

The girl nodded gravely. "He does me, too. But I just tremble like a coward, the way I did when your dog came. Oh, but my father was surprised at you!" For the first time she laughed. But she checked herself at once. "He made me afraid of his dogs once when I was a baby," she explained. "Now I cannot help the fear."

Sarah was shocked into silence. A father frighten his baby! She thought of Pa. "Where was your mother?" she asked, feebly. "Why didn't she stop him?"

"She ran away from him and went back to her people in Tyrol. He frightened her, too. But she got away while she still had the courage. Some day when I have enough, I shall go, too." She hesitated and then seemed to force herself to take a plunge. "I tell you this because you have great courage. Will you teach me how to find it?"

Sarah bent over Dakin and pulled his ears gently. Her throat felt queer and choked. The whole situation was outside her experience. What could one do?

"I wouldn't be scared of him if I were you," she said in low tones. "Maybe he gets cross," she

was feeling her way now, "because it really is a strain to make such beautiful music."

"I can play, too." The girl lifted her head proudly. "He does not know. But some day people will listen to me instead of to him. You shall see." The blue eyes had a far-away prophetic lift to them.

Then Sarah saw a piteous terror film their light. She knew without being told that Signor Rizzio was behind her.

"Go into the house, Elsa," he said, in Italian. "So you gossip with peasants!"

The man's tone eked out Sarah's brief store of Italian words. She knew what he meant. She leaped to her feet and cast a scornful eye after Elsa's receding back. "I will go myself," she informed him, "and then you will not have to talk with them either."

The man lifted an eyebrow at her. "What? You understand Italian. And you own a perfect dog. Good! We shall come to terms." He called Dakin and spoke softly to him with Italian endearments which Dakin met with sentimental appreciation of tail and eye.

"You'd think he understood Italian," thought the exasperated Sarah. "And there he'd never lis-

ten to a word Johnnie might say to him. Oh, what a dog!"

"What is your price today?" He looked at Sarah sharply over Dakin's head.

"Just the same as it was yesterday." Sarah kept cool. "My dog is not for sale."

"Oh, really?" How could two words hold such maddening inflection?

"I'd like to tell him that Dakin wouldn't be a bit of use at scaring children either. But it would only make him mad at Elsa," thought Sarah. The next instant she was glad of her restraint.

"You like music, do you?" Sarah nodded breathlessly at the quick question. "Won't you come in for one moment and listen to me play?" The man was courtesy itself.

"Oh, yes! May I? Will you really?" Sarah was incoherent.

For answer Signor Rizzio turned toward the house, his hand still on Dakin's collar. Sarah followed at their heels. Through the French doors, into the wide music room. Sarah had no more awkwardness than in a dream come true. Of herself she had no thought.

"Better let me have Dakin," she suggested. "He might sing."

The man caught her meaning and laughed. "I

know," he said. "Mine do sometimes." He could be charming.

He seated himself at the shining instrument in the corner, and as if it had been a magic carpet he took Sarah away with him to a strange new beautiful world. How long they were gone she did not know. She would probably have stayed forever crouched in the big chair listening if he had not suddenly risen and dismissed her. She tried to murmur thanks, but she did not feel at all sure whether she had said anything or not, when she found herself running down the beach with Dakin.

Pa listened patiently to her tale. "Gosh, Sarah, I do wish there was some way I could get you all the music you wanted."

"I got it today, Pa," said Sarah solemnly. "For the first time in my life I had music till I was satisfied."

"Yes, but that won't last," said Pa wisely. "What you need is to be able to make it yourself."

Sarah looked wistfully at the old boarding house piano. "I work hard at it, Pa. Perhaps some day I can."

Pa was right. Sarah managed to stay away from the Shore House for a few days. But she was

restless. "I might as well run down there for a few minutes," she decided at last. "Maybe I'll see Elsa again."

When she opened the back door she was amazed to hear Signor Rizzio's voice just around the corner of the house. He was talking to Pa.

"I should like your dog for my kennels," he was saying in his precise English. "I will pay you any reasonable price."

"But he isn't my dog." Pa's voice had the gentle patience of one who has said a thing over and over. "He belongs to my girl."

The musician's voice sharpened. "I understood you. But you are her father, are you not?"

"Now see here," said Pa, "let's get this straight. What's Sarah's is Sarah's. I can't sell you her property, can I?"

There was unaffected surprise in Signor Rizzio's. "Why not?"

A pause. Then Pa's voice, not quite so patient. "I guess you don't understand about American fathers and their girls. We treat 'em—" he hesitated—"we treat 'em just like anybody else."

Sarah shut the door softly and hugged herself. "Oh, darling old Pa! The angel! And what a good one to pull on Elsa's father. I only hope it jabs in like a porcupine's quill until it gets to his brain."

She was pleased with her figure. "But it would kill him if it did. Well, it's not much use going up to the Shore House now." She forgot that Elsa was supposed to be the object of her call.

But the next afternoon, after school, she was at her place under the rocks, Dakin beside her. Again she heard the ravishing music. It roused in her a passion of longing to do it herself. "I must!" she cried. "I must! I can't go on all my life wanting anything so much and not being able to get it. Oh, Dakin, Dakin, I'd sell my soul to learn to play like that!"

"Entirely unnecessary," came the crisp voice behind her. "Souls haven't been bartered since Faust's time."

Sarah sprang to her feet, abashed. "You know I didn't mean that! I was just——"

"The exaggeration of youth." The man smiled at her tolerantly. Sarah nodded, relieved at his understanding. "But I was about to suggest," he went on, "that if you really have any ability, perhaps I could help you."

"I can't tell you how I felt, Pa," Sarah told her father afterward, "just as if a gate of Heaven had swung open."

"Suppose we go up to the music room," said Signor Rizzio, "and let me see whether it is worth

your while to attempt to play. I can tell you very quickly."

"You mean—you mean I am to play for you?"

"Why not, my child? How am I to find out otherwise?"

"Oh, he *is* kind! I never can do it! I will do it! I can't! But I'm going to!" Sarah's thoughts tumbled over each other in her excitement.

"Now this will never do." The little man turned to her at the door of the music room. "Pull yourself together. Play to me as if I were—" he made a wry face—"as if I were that model father of yours."

Sarah suddenly heard Pa's voice out in the backyard reasoning with this intolerant little man. Her thoughts cleared into an appreciation of what this trial would mean to him. "Thank you," she said. "I will think about him."

She sat down at the great piano and reverently touched its keys. She, Sarah Thurston, had her hands on this perfect instrument. And she could only play the simple pieces which Miss Jennie had taught her. But she had worked hard on them and she would play them the best she knew how. There was that faint, faint chance that this great man would help her.

When Sarah heard the response to her touch,

she forgot all fear in her wonder that she could draw this rich, singing quality from a piano. Could it be the same piece that she played on the old tinny piano at home? She listened to it as if someone else were playing it. And when she had finished, she dropped her hands into her lap and said simply, "Wasn't that beautiful?"

"Beautiful?" a snort at her side shocked her. "It was terrible! You play—you play—you do not play at all!"

Sarah rose, hurt beyond any anger. "I didn't mean my playing," she said. "I meant your piano." She stood looking at him a moment in her pale young dignity. "You should have known that."

The little man's mood instantly changed. "Of course, of course," he assented. "And you will play yet. If you can unlearn everything you have learned. That will be difficult, but—" he eyed her shrewdly—"you are a girl of spirit. You can do it."

Sarah forgot the blow he had just dealt her. "Oh, I could," she cried. "I would—I would—well, of course I wouldn't sell my soul, but I'd do 'most anything else."

"Exactly," said the man. "You would do well, too, to make the sacrifice. It is only one person

now and then out of the whole wide world that I consent to teach. If you have it in you to achieve, I can bring about the miracle."

"But we have very little money." Sarah's voice shook with eagerness. "Perhaps you would let me wash your dishes, or help about the house the way I do for Miss Jennie's lesson that she gives——"

The pompous voice interrupted her. "I do not desire your money. And I can pay my own maids." Sarah's face fell. "We can arrange much more simply than that. I will give you lessons. Your dog shall come to live in my beautiful kennels."

Sarah stared at him incredulously. "You mean that you'd take my Dakin if you gave me lessons?" Her fingers unconsciously gripped the long ruff of the waiting dog.

"I am offering you a fair exchange"—those inexorable, precise tones—"and a fair exchange is no——"

Scorn swept over Sarah, blotting out all other emotions. Whether she ever played the piano or not was a matter of no moment to her. "So this is only your scheme to get my dog! If one way wouldn't work, you tried another." Her anger grew. "Very likely you never meant to give me more than one lesson after you got Dakin. You'd

have said that it was impossible to teach me anything." She stopped. The little man had fairly leaped at her and his dark face burned up into hers as he poured out a torrent of Italian phrases.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Dakin growled. His lips drew back, baring his long white teeth. Sarah jerked him away. "You see," she said, "you've lost his respect as well as mine." Her voice broke. After all, it had been a trying experience for any girl. "And I'm sorry you did it." She ran out of the room. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

When she heard steps running behind her on the beach, she thought for one moment of panic that the musician had come after her. "Dakin won't let him get me," she panted. Then she saw Dakin stop and wag his tail. She turned and looked down into Elsa's blue eyes.

The girl seemed to have forgotten her fear of Dakin. "I'm not sorry!" she exulted. "I'm not sorry. I am glad, glad, glad!"

Sarah's emotions by this time were entirely worn out. She slumped down on the sand. "Well, I'm pleased," she said, "if there's anything to be glad about. Guess that's the only part of the conversation you heard or you wouldn't talk that way."

"I heard it all," cried the girl. "I eaves-

dropped." ("Well," thought Sarah, "I did the same myself the other day.") "And for once in his life my father got what he deserved." She seized Sarah's hands. "Why, if I were as brave as you are, I wouldn't care if I never played."

Down went Sarah's red-gold head on her knees. This was the one thing that she could not bear yet. "But I do," she wailed. " I do care, I do. And I thought he was going to help me. Now I'll never play!" She lifted her head, her eyes rebellious in her renunciation. "He shouldn't have tempted me. I wish I'd said, 'What if I offered to do something for you if you'd pass over your child?' "

"He would have told you, 'Take her and welcome.' " Elsa's voice was dry. She stared out at the sea and seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Poor Elsa," thought Sarah through her troubles. "Look at all I've got. Pa and Dakin and an old tin piano——"

Elsa interrupted her summary of her blessings. "This is what we are going to do," she said. ("She sounds as sure as her father," thought Sarah.) "Tomorrow afternoon at your house I will begin to give you lessons. You have a gift. I heard you play. Moreover, my father would not have offered to teach you for a thousand dogs if you had not. Wait." She held up a peremptory hand. "My

father, while he will have nothing to do with my music, has permitted me the best masters. I can play. Ah, he does not know how well! And better," she went on, "I know how they have taught me. Ah, I boast like him!" her mouth twisted in distaste. "But I will do as I say. Will you try me?"

Sarah's heart leaped. But she had had a bitter lesson that day. "What would you want?" she asked wearily.

The girl's face to the roots of her hair suffused pink. For a terrible moment Sarah felt as if she had struck her. "Elsa! Elsa!" she cried.

Elsa shook her head. She was pale again. "I know," she said. "I do not blame you." Her round face took on a kind of maturity. "I like you. I like you better than any girl I ever knew. Will you let me give you lessons?"

Sarah nodded humbly. It was difficult for her to break through her New England reserve. "I'd be glad if you would," she said. "Would half-past four suit you?"

They parted, and Sarah looked back to see Elsa strolling slowly along the beach past the music room. "Almost as if she didn't care who saw her," marvelled Sarah. "Well, I must say I know how she felt when I thought he was chasing me." She

sighed, utterly tired out. "I like her, too. Maybe I can find some kind of a fair exchange for her. But she really doesn't expect a thing, not a thing. Well, Dakin, I suppose that ought to offset her pa. Think we should forgive him?"

Dakin waved his tail. He never held grudges.

"Well, I don't," said Sarah, honestly. "And you better not if you don't want to wake up some day and find yourself in his beautiful kennels."

Dakin gave a care-free yap at a passing seagull. Wasn't he Sarah's Dakin?

IS NO
ROBBERY

ELSA'S MUSIC

Chapter XI

IS NO ROBBERY

AT exactly half-past four, Sarah saw Elsa coming up the path. She was looking about her with considerable curiosity and when she caught a glimpse of Sarah's hammock bed under the trees, she stopped short. So interested was she, that she failed to notice Dakin, who was rushing toward her with cordial greeting. In his enthusiasm he flung himself against her, barking delightedly. Sarah, running toward them, saw the girl throw up her arms and crumple down on the path where Dakin nosed at her, thinking it was a new kind of a game.

"Oh, he's done it now! he's done it now!" gasped Sarah, trying to whistle and call and run all at once. "She'll never come here again. I bet he's killed her anyway!"

Then she saw Elsa sit up, white as a ghost, reach her hand out toward Dakin's nose, withdraw it, then actually touch it. Sarah was upon them now, breathless, apologizing. But before she

could pull Dakin away, Elsa had risen and was collecting some scattered sheets of music.

"I must have stubbed my toe," she said. "Don't scold him."

"Good sport!" inwardly approved Sarah. "If I don't tie that dog!"

But the hour had begun badly. Elsa was nervous and irritable. The piano was too impossible to use. No one could play on it. "It's all I've got," said Sarah shortly. Then it would have to be tuned. "No tuner this side of Ellsworth, and can't afford him." Sarah was getting edgy, too. Elsa twisted about on the stool, making distasteful dabs at the keys.

At last Sarah rose and picked up the music books Elsa had laid on the piano. "I'm much obliged to you for coming down," she said, "but it's no use. I know how bad this piano is since I heard your father's. But it's all I've got and there's nothing I can do about it." She handed the music to Elsa. "Thank you for coming."

With as lightning-like change as ever her father achieved, Elsa's irritation cleared. "Oh, Sarah," she cried, "give me another chance. I *was* scared. I didn't stub my toe. I fell flat with fright."

Sarah giggled. Elsa suddenly laughed herself. "I am an idiot. But after a scare, I feel so queer

inside. Please let me come tomorrow. I will watch for the dog and not be surprised again." She looked at Sarah pleadingly over the books.

"Piano'll be just the same," reminded Sarah.

Elsa looked thoughtful. "Perhaps," she said. "Anyway, let me come. You don't know how I've looked forward to it."

"Why, of course," cried Sarah warmly. "Come and welcome. I'm the one that should be begging you. I'll tie up Dakin."

"No, I wish you wouldn't." Elsa spoke slowly. "You will not?"

Sarah sighed. It was hard to please these foreigners. "All right," she consented.

The next morning was Saturday. Sarah was rolling out Pa's favorite cookies on the table by the window when she saw a big car poking its way up the path.

"Someone else thinking this is a road that goes somewhere." She dusted the flour from her hands and waved them back toward the road. But the car kept on. It stopped, and perched on the edge of the back seat Sarah saw Mr. Nubb, Ellsworth's piano tuner. He held his instrument case cautiously in his arms.

Sarah realized the situation instantly. "She sent for him in her car. Well, here he is. I can't

send him back. But how under the sun I'll ever pay him! Come in, Mr. Nubb. Yes—" to the chauffeur—"you can turn around by the barn."

All the morning she baked cookies and rolled pie crust to the ting! ting! and quick runs of the piano tuner's performance. At noon the car drove up again, Mr. Nubb picked up his box and stepped out trying to look as if he always had a limousine waiting for him.

Sarah drew a little leather purse from her apron pocket. In it was the money she had saved for her graduation dress. "How much do I owe you, Mr. Nubb?" She tried to make her voice sound casual. Perhaps there would still be enough left to fix up her old white dress.

"Have to settle with that girl down at Shore House. She paid me in advance because she thought you might not have the change handy. She said you'd fix it up with her all right." Mr. Nubb climbed into the car and balanced his precious box on his knees.

"Well," said Sarah, nonplussed. Then she called out, "How much was it, anyway?" But the chauffeur had started his engine and Mr. Nubb did not hear. Sarah watched the car drive out. Then she walked over and laid the purse on the edge of the piano.

At half-past four Dakin was not tied, but he was up in the vegétable garden with Pa, helping him weed. Elsa marched up the path, head up, eyes in every direction, walking very fast. Once inside the door she relaxed with a long breath of relief. Neither of the girls mentioned Dakin.

Elsa tried the piano at once and nodded her head with satisfaction. "It has no depth of tone but it is true now," she announced. "It will do very well."

Sarah's relief drowned regret at the extravagance. "Guess it's worth any new dress," she thought, "and there may be enough left for trimmings." She picked up her purse. "How much do I owe you? Mr. Nubb said you settled with him."

Again the second lesson seemed about to be disrupted. Sarah was firm, Elsa in great distress. Neither would yield. At last Elsa turned to Sarah with that sudden maturity which sat so oddly on her round blond face. "You place too high value on money," she said distinctly. "What you give me cannot be paid for. Let us waste no more time bickering over pennies. Something much more important awaits us." She turned to the piano and opened a lesson book.

Sarah looked at her back a moment and then laid the purse in her desk. The lesson began.

"She's a different girl," Sarah told Pa, "as soon as she gets near a piano. A lot older, and surer of herself—and oh, I don't know!"

Sarah wondered a good deal about this curious change that came over Elsa when she was absorbed in her music. She had a kind of assurance and poise which was entirely unrelated to her timidity. Her whole body swung into a new rhythm. She sat erect beside Sarah, her eyes impersonal, her hands, so full of potential energy, close by the keyboard. Every finger-tip seemed to watch Sarah's movements.

Once she struck Sarah's knuckles sharply with a little baton. Sarah whirled indignantly to meet that calm impersonal gaze. "Your mind is elsewhere," said Elsa. "Attend to your work, please."

"Well," admitted Sarah humbly, "it was. I left a pie in the oven. Do you think I can go take it out?"

Elsa frowned and nodded. But a moment later Sarah found her at her heels, sniffing into the oven. "Did you make that thing which is of perfect fragrance?" she asked.

"I did," said Sarah, beginning to feel self-respect again. "It's an apple pie. Have a piece?"

Elsa hesitated. Sarah poised a knife over the hot pie on the table. It was golden brown with

drops like honey in its slits. It did smell good, Sarah thought. Then she laid the knife down. Elsa was back in the sitting room. "When the lesson is over," she said. Sarah felt like a little girl again.

But when the lesson was over she brought out glasses of cold creamy milk from the cellar, and cut the pie which was still warm into big triangles. Then Sarah was the hostess and Elsa watched her with tremendous admiration for her deftness. "If I could make a pie like that—" she had not left a crumb—"I should certainly feel what you call smart."

"I'll teach you how any time," offered Sarah. "Come over next Saturday morning when I bake. And if you don't do it right, I'll hit you with the rolling pin."

Elsa turned pink, but she laughed. "Sometimes," she said, "I know exactly how my father feels."

There was no sign of her father, however, when she stood over the kitchen table on a Saturday morning, her round face puckered with anxiety, smudges of flour on her cheeks. She might have been her Tyrol mother buttoned up in a blue apron. When a pan of cookies burned, she nearly wept.

"That's because you didn't keep your mind on your work." Sarah's eyes had a reminiscent look.

"No," mourned Elsa. "It is too much there. Every detail crowds out every other detail."

"Fine," said Sarah, "I'll try to remember that."

Sarah was a born cook and she took the business of baking lightly. At noon she was as fresh as ever, while poor Elsa looked too exhausted to move from the kitchen rocker where she had dropped.

"I tell you what," said Sarah, "you stay to dinner. Go in my room and lie down, and I'll have it on the table in a jiffy."

"Do," came Pa's cordial ratification from the kitchen sink. "We'd be pleased to have you. Think your Pa would mind?"

Elsa's laugh was not quite pleasant. "No, it won't trouble him. We never lunch together. I don't see him until night."

Sarah and Pa exchanged glances when Elsa had gone out of the room. "They don't seem very sociable with each other," was Pa's only comment as he dried his hands.

To Elsa, Pa seemed to be a subject of endless speculation. She watched him with Sarah when he talked his grave nonsense to her. She waited for Sarah's answers, sure and swift. She learned

to laugh at them, a comical little chuckle which amused Pa. More and more frequently she dropped in for a few odd minutes. Sarah's school hours were irregular now with all the preparation for graduation. Elsa was deeply interested in the new dress. She had an eye for line and an appreciation of Sarah's brilliant coloring which secured for the dress a sophisticated air that the little country dressmaker had never achieved before. Elsa bloomed into unexpected dimples that matched her chuckle. She rarely looked sullen now.

During all these days Sarah never saw Signor Rizzio. Neither she nor Dakin went near that end of the beach. She knew that Elsa dined with him at night but by silent consent they did not discuss him. To Pa's genial inquiry now and then, Elsa would answer punctiliously, but even Pa was unable to get a friendly note when she spoke of her father.

Sarah longed to hear the magic music again, but just when the longing seemed too great for her to keep away another day, Elsa would take her place at the piano after a lesson. The old piano woke to new life then. Elsa was right when she said she could play. Sarah would listen until the enchantment was woven about her. Now

she knew that some time she would play, too. Elsa had said so. And beyond the word of Elsa's father, Sarah had faith in Elsa.

A few days before graduation exercises, Sarah came home in distress. As valedictorian and chairman of the entertainment committee, she felt considerable responsibility for the success of the evening. "The violinist can't come over from Ellsworth," she told Pa. "He's got the measles. And it leaves an awful hole in the program."

"Well, well! Measles!" commiserated Pa. "A hole! Why don't you play for them?"

"Oh, Pa, I know better than that now. I'm going to play the march for the Seniors, and the Class Song. But I'm not a performer yet."

"I think you're fine," asserted Pa loyally. "But if you don't feel as if you could, why don't you ask Elsa?"

"She'd never do it." Sarah's worried face did not clear. "Elsa is an artist. She couldn't play for a little country entertainment."

"One of you can't because she isn't, and the other one can't because she is," observed Pa. "Kind of queer about musicians."

Sarah laughed. "All right, I'll ask her. But I've got to know right away." She hesitated. "Think it would be all right to run up there?"

"Sure," said Pa. "Why not?"

Dakin joined Sarah when she reached the shore or she would not have taken him. His coat was wet and muddy and he seemed in high spirits at her appearance.

"Get down!" commanded Sarah. "I guess it's safe enough to take you along. No one would want to keep such a looking dog as you are."

Dakin seemed very little depressed at her remarks. He had been having a good time with the gulls. He raced ahead of Sarah and to her horror leaped straight up the Shore House steps and through the French doors. Sarah stood transfixed on the beach. "What under the sun am I going to do?" She watched the open doors. "How'll I ever get him out?"

She whistled. No response. "Dakin!" she called sharply. The French doors swung together before her eyes. "Well, of all things!" gasped Sarah. Then she marched up the long steps. When she rapped on the door there was no response. Cupping her eyes with her hands she peered in. The music room was empty. She saw with grim pleasure some muddy dog prints in the creamy center of the Chinese rug.

"This may be breaking and entering," said Sarah, "but I'm going in." She pushed the doors

back and walked in. "Now which way?" she thought.

So completely had she learned to associate Elsa with her own home that she felt a shock of surprise when she found her sitting in the next room.

"For goodness' sake, Elsa, how'd you come here?" Then she realized the absurdity of her question. "I suppose you might better ask me how I got in here."

Elsa seemed not at all surprised. "I thought you would be along very soon when I heard you trying to call Dakin back. Usually he comes without you."

"Dakin comes here without me?" Sarah was incredulous.

"Very often," Elsa chuckled. "He likes my Pa."

"Well, of all the dogs! Say, Elsa, run along and get him for me, please. And then I want to ask you about something."

Elsa stiffened. "Oh, no!" she cried. "I couldn't get him for you. No, no, Sarah, he is with my father."

"Well, he isn't your father's dog," said Sarah. "I'll go get him myself."

Elsa paled. "You mustn't, Sarah, you mustn't. He'd never forgive either of us."

"I don't know as I care whether he forgives me for going after my own dog that he's kidnapped," sputtered Sarah. "Any particular direction you'd advise me to go?" She started toward a door.

"They are usually out on the tennis court." Elsa had shrunk back into her chair.

"Don't you want to come along too?" Sarah grinned provokingly.

Elsa shook her head. "I couldn't, Sarah," she whispered. "I couldn't."

Sarah knew where the tennis court was. She had often prowled about the Shore place when it was vacant. She ran lightly down the little wood path which led to it. The approaching encounter brought only a sense of elation. This little man must learn that he couldn't carry off other people's property.

Where the trees ended, Sarah stopped and blinked into the glare of sunshine on the white court. Then she leaned against a tree and watched. Across the court, around it, raced the dog and the man. Tennis balls flew. The man's pockets and Dakin's mouth seemed full of them. Some kind of a complicated game was going on. Sarah caught a glimpse of the musician's face as he darted past. It was like a boy's, dark and gleaming. Sarah's fingers tingled to join the game, but instead she

drew back discreetly behind a tree. After a few minutes she tiptoed softly down the path. Her eyes had the motherly look that they sometimes took on when Bobby had proved himself only a bad little boy.

Elsa was waiting in trepidation. "Wouldn't he let you have him?" she asked. "Oh, Sarah, what are you going to do?"

Sarah smiled at her. "Sometimes I think you take your father too seriously. Just run down there to the edge of the tennis court. Don't let them see you. And hurry back. I've something important to ask you."

When Elsa came back, looking puzzled and pink, neither of the girls spoke of what they had seen. Sarah explained the measles complication. "I know you won't want to do it," she said, "but Pa said to ask you."

"He knows me better than you do," was Elsa's only comment. "Of course I will play for them."

So great was Sarah's relief and so instant her absorption in explaining details to Elsa who walked down the beach with her, that she quite honestly forgot Dakin until Elsa turned back.

"My land, that dog!" she cried. Then she laughed into Elsa's embarrassed face. "Now see here," she said, "they both need exercise and they

are getting it. I don't mind how often he visits your Pa if that's what they do. And you mustn't mind, either."

Elsa's face cleared. "And you thought I wouldn't play for you!" she cried. "If I could only do something really difficult for you!"

Graduation night Sarah was so charged with excitement that when her fingers touched Dakin's nose, the electric spark that exploded sent him running into the next room. Elsa was going to drive down to the Town Hall with them. "I'd like to take you in the car," she said to Sarah, "but I don't want Father to know that I am going out."

"Plenty of room," explained Sarah. "Be here at quarter of eight sharp."

Now she was late. Sarah paced the floor. Pa pulled out his big gold watch every few moments. Dakin watched warily from the back seat. Something was wrong, and he never felt sure that the trouble might not lie with him and prevent his departure.

"We'll have to go without her," at last Sarah announced. "There's got to be a valedictory even if there's no music." She picked up her roses and scarf and climbed into the wagon. Dakin edged along the wide seat, calling as little attention to

himself as possible. Pa laid the lap robe over the filmy white of her dress with anxious concern. "Something kept her," he consoled Sarah. "She'll come yet."

As Minnie turned on to the main road, Sarah saw her, running swiftly, a pale shape in the late June twilight. "There she is, Pa! Whoa! Whoa!"

Elsa, careless of her lovely, glittering dress, flung herself on to the seat. "I couldn't get away earlier to dress. I didn't want him—dinner was late—oh, how I ran!"

"There, there," soothed Pa. "Plenty of time. We might have picked you up at the Shore Road, anyway. Have to go right by there."

Elsa sank back into a silence out of which she was obviously trying to capture the control and quiet for her playing. Sarah understood. She, too, was concerned with remembering all that she had set forth in her valedictory. Neither noticed Pa peer forward into the gloom until he suddenly hauled up Minnie, and they heard his cordial greeting. "Why, if here isn't Mr. Rizzio himself! Just in time to get a lift with us. You'll be pretty late if you try to walk all the way to the Town Hall. Come aboard."

Into the horror-frozen silence, Sarah heard the sharp voice, "Thank you, I am out for a walk."

"Yes, but you'll never make it in time to hear your girl play. Get in! get in!" Pa turned and regarded Sarah, who had dug her elbow into his unsuspecting side. But it was too late. Signor Rizzio had stepped to the edge of the wheel and stared up at the passengers. His eyes lingered on Dakin curled up between the girls. Then deliberately, with malice in every movement, he climbed up and seated himself beside Pa. The two girls huddled together in the seat behind.

Sarah listened drearily to Pa, who, suspecting now that something was wrong, was making a valiant effort to give Signor Rizzio an appreciation of his daughter's part in the performance.

"I don't know as I ever really felt mad at Pa before," thought Sarah. "But he's ruined my graduation. And I don't know what he's done to Elsa." She reached across Dakin and touched Elsa's hand. It was like ice. There was no response from the cold fingers. The girl was huddled up against the wagon side. Sarah could not see her face in the gloom.

Signor Rizzio turned part way round toward the back seat and spoke to Elsa in Italian. Elsa flung one arm about Dakin's neck, her fingers clutching into the long fur of his ruff. Sarah saw the man wheel further about and stare at the girl

and the dog. He raised his voice in ironical inquiry, but Elsa's only response was to dig her fingers deeper into Dakin's neck. The dog made a quick dab at her with affectionate tongue. Signor Rizzio laughed and turned back to Pa.

Elsa drooped toward Sarah's shoulder. Sarah bent her head to listen to the incoherent whisper. "Must run back—as soon as the horse stops—don't tell him—I can find my way—Oh, Sarah, don't tell him—not till I've had time to get home."

Sarah's heart was torn. Elsa's terror was so pitiful. And yet so humiliating. How could she let anyone frighten her like this! Sarah caught a brief glimpse of understanding of the man who must feel only contempt for a human being who allowed herself to be tortured.

"Elsa," she whispered sharply, "for goodness' sake, brace up. Don't play, if you don't want to. But have sense enough not to run away." She felt Elsa stiffen. "I might as well be cruel, too," she thought, recklessly. "Evening's ruined anyway."

"Don't act like a scared rabbit. Have some spunk. Give him as good as he sends. He'll like you a whole lot better for it."

"But how could I play—" Sarah was relieved that she no longer spoke of running away—"with

him sitting there and watching me with that look in his eyes? He has never even heard me play."

"Time he did, then." Sarah's whisper was brisk. "Guess if I could play for him, you can." She was beginning to feel hopeful.

There was a long silence. Even Pa had subsided. The horse pulled up at the Town Hall door. Pa clambered out and turned to help the girls, but Signor Rizzio was ahead of him. Sarah felt quite abashed by the courtly grace of his movements. He ignored Dakin, who settled down comfortably for an evening's nap in the bottom of the wagon.

"Look as pretty as pinks, don't they?" said Pa. "Lucky we made it in time. There wouldn't be much of an entertainment without our pair."

"I am curious to see what entertainment there will be with them," Sarah heard the musician murmur. "If you find," the sardonic voice went on, "that your second musician is attacked by any sudden difficulty, permit me to offer myself as a poor substitute."

"Thank you," said Sarah, hardily, "we are all fixed now."

"Acts as if he was trying to goad Elsa into something," she thought. "Well, I'll take him at his word if she goes back on me." She looked

doubtfully at Elsa stumbling along beside her. The girl did actually look sick. "I can't do anything more about it now." Sarah showed Elsa to her seat behind the piano, and seating herself on the stool, struck the opening chord of the Seniors' march. A scuffle of nervous feet outside answered, and in the moment's wait, Sarah leaned toward Elsa and spoke in an undertone. "You said you wished you could so something really hard," she reminded her. "Now's your chance. You couldn't do anything harder."

Elsa lifted sick eyes to the glowing face a moment and then returned to the contemplation of her inert hands in her lap.

Bang! Sarah struck the keys again and noted with delight the nervous start of the dark little man in the front row. "Got as near as he could so he'd do all the damage possible. Well, this won't do. The Seniors will come in on all fours if I play this way." She swung into the rhythm of the march.

Twelve girls stepping with the demure self-consciousness of the high school graduate, three gangly boys in stiff collars and well-pressed suits, a large class for the town and one which roused its noisy pride. Sarah watched Signor Rizzio under her eyelashes. "He might just as well stop

that flinching business," she thought with malicious delight at his restlessness. "Wait till he hears 'em clap my valedictory."

Clap they did! The uncertainty and excitement had set Sarah afire. She had the incandescent look that high moments gave her. And Elsa's trouble had made her forget herself entirely. The village admired and liked Sarah and it did not hesitate to show its appreciation. Sarah suddenly found as she sat down that she was deeply touched. Some quite new emotion had pierced through her high spirits.

"Pa better stop his clapping," she thought. "What will people think!" But she choked up a little at his pride. How queer Signor Rizzio looked, black and sullen, though he was applauding politely. Sarah's eyes sought Elsa, slouched in her seat, pale, lifeless, and she had an instant's quick insight into the bitterness of the other father. "Oh, if Elsa only would!" She felt as if she must pour some of her own vitality and confidence into Elsa to release her from this evil spell.

Now the principal was introducing Miss Rizzio who would substitute for the violinist on the program. Elsa did not lift her eyes. How they stared at her when she rose, this stranger with her

fair hair and glittering dress! Her foreign name, the rumors about her queer father and his fame! Could she play, too, this big clumsy girl who looked so unlike him and who was so obviously panic-stricken? Sarah saw some of the audience staring at the girl's father in evident relish at his discomfort. Signor Rizzio was no favorite.

Elsa sank heavily on the piano stool and cast one more piteous glance at her father. He returned her look, dark, imperturbable. She touched the keys.

And then Sarah saw that miraculous transformation take place, the curious change that always came over Elsa when her fingers struck the keys. Though never before had the contrast been so sharp. The girl's body straightened, the blood flowed back into the dead white of her skin; she seemed suddenly years older and years wiser. A being apart from them all.

All unused as the villagers were to music, they sat as still as Sarah while the magic wove into their dreams. Sarah scarcely breathed. The terrible suspense was over; she knew Elsa was playing as she had never before played. Once she tore her eyes from the glittering magnetic figure at the piano to the father watching her. Then she

glanced away again. It was somehow unfair to surprise that look in the man's eyes.

It was over. Sarah knew without any jealousy that all their applause for her was as nothing to this ovation for Elsa. She was afraid Pa was stamping his feet a little. But beyond everything she was aware that Signor Rizzio was half out of his chair, pounding the arms and calling "*Brava! Brava!*" Elsa was aware, too, and to Sarah's amazed delight, she tossed him a kiss from the tip of a forefinger. Then she sat down and a gangly boy read the class prophecy.

But through the rest of the exercises Signor Rizzio sat as if he were in a trance. He applauded automatically and he rose automatically for the benediction. Sarah saw Pa introducing him to some of the neighbors, and his stiff little bows at their greeting. In the confusion of congratulations and jokes and good-byes, Sarah did not see Elsa until Pa led her out to the wagon. "They're out here," he explained in an undertone. "Went ahead."

On the back seat with Dakin's sleepy head in her lap sat Elsa beside her father. "Do you mind, Sarah?" Elsa's voice had a queer little tremulo in it. "Father wants to tell me about the symphony which he is just finishing. He has been at

work on it for nearly two years. It is no wonder that he is almost worn out."

"Must be! Must be!" agreed Pa, who had no idea what a symphony was. "Climb in beside me, Sarah. Guess you can put up with me, can't you?"

Sarah linked her arm in Pa's, and leaned against his shoulder as she had done ever since she was a little girl when they rode together in the night.

"Get up, Minnie! How'd you like the entertainment, Mr. Rizzio? Think our pair did pretty well?"

Sarah listened without turning her head, her cheek close to Pa's rough shoulder.

"I have had pride over various things I have done in my life," came the distinct enunciation from behind her. "But my pride was as nothing to that which I felt tonight." He paused. "My daughter is a musician, Mr. Thurston."

"Well, she comes honestly by it, I guess," was Pa's genial response. But Sarah noticed that he, too, kept his face turned from the back seat. Elsa and her father. Elsa no longer afraid. The beginning of understanding. It was too poignant, too far-reaching a thing for Sarah to realize into collected thoughts. She sat quietly and listened to the murmurs of Italian behind her.

At the Shore Road, the Rizzios got out of the wagon. "Drive you down to the house," offered Pa, "just as lief as not."

"Thank you, no, we shall enjoy the walk;" Signor Rizzio made his stiff little bow from the waist. "If Signorina Sarah would care to attend the first performance of my symphony for my daughter, I shall welcome her."

"Oh, I will! I would, thank you," cried Sarah. "Oh, Elsa!"

"I'll see you tomorrow," called Elsa. Her voice sounded care-free and very young. Sarah could see her white arm against the black sleeve of her father's evening coat. They turned down the road, walking close together.

Dakin yawned from the back seat where he had been disturbed.

"Got cut out, didn't you, old man?" Pa chuckled at him, and Sarah knew he understood. "Get up, Minnie. Time the performers got to bed."

KEEPING THE HOME OPEN

Chapter XII

KEEPING THE HOME OPEN

THE engine puffed out clouds of cinders and smoke. Dust rose from the unshaded road-bed. A choking gust through the car window enveloped both of the girls. Elsa crumpled the newspaper in one hand and leaned across Sarah to shut the window with the other.

"Do you mind?" she asked politely.

Sarah did not open her eyes. She pulled herself listlessly back still further into the corner of the seat to make room for Elsa's efforts. "Might as well parboil as choke to death," she muttered.

Elsa glanced sharply at the face outlined against the plush of the seat. Was it the red of the plush that made Sarah look so pale? Faint blue lines were pencilled under her eyes. Without her brilliant coloring Sarah had a fragile look.

"Don't you feel well, Sarah?" Elsa's voice was gentle.

Sarah opened her eyes, and Elsa was startled

at the look of sick unhappiness in them. "Of course I do," she said, sharply. "I'm always well."

Elsa opened her newspaper again and the train beat its rhythm into their silence. Then Sarah sighed and sat up. "Excuse me, Elsa," she said. "You were an angel to come with me, and I don't know why I am as cross as a bear all the time."

Elsa stared out of the grimy window a minute as if she were considering something. "You act to me unhappy, Sarah," she said finally. "Almost as unhappy as I used to be."

Sarah did not turn her head from her inspection of telegraph poles.

"Don't you want to go up to Buxton to see the Normal School today?" probed Elsa.

Again silence. Then—"No! I don't want to see it today or any other day!" The words were a bitter explosion.

Elsa nodded. "I thought so." Her voice was carefully impersonal.

Sarah gave her a quick alarmed glance. "Do you think anyone else would guess?"

"Well, Sarah"—Elsa measured her words—"you know you haven't been yourself since school closed. And I really think you are getting thin." She looked anxiously at Sarah's ungloved hand lying inert on her lap.

Sarah twitched her fingers under a fold of her dress. "Nonsense," she said. Silence again.

"Next station will be Buxton!" called the brakeman.

Sarah's hand shot out and clutched at Elsa. "Do we have to get off?"

"Not for ten minutes." Elsa smiled encouragement. "Why don't you want to see the place, Sarah, now that we have come so far? You may find it much nicer than you expect."

"Elsa," Sarah spoke as if she could not stand the pressure of her own silence any longer, "I can not bear the thought of that place. Don't you ever tell a soul." Elsa shook her head. "I've been hoping something would happen so I wouldn't have to go. But now I've even won that miserable scholarship where I sweep for my board—oh, I don't mind the sweeping, you know I don't! And here I am going to see the place, so that after this I can't push it out of my mind and make believe it isn't waiting to swallow me up. I'll just see it and know it really is there."

"Well, now let's wait and see if you don't like it better when we get there," said Elsa, comfortingly. "Here, stand up and let me brush some of the cinders off."

As the two girls walked up the shady street

toward the Normal School, it seemed as if Elsa might be right. Sarah looked about her with curiosity. She had rarely been away from her own village, and a strange place was full of interest. Different goods in the shop windows, houses with much more of town style, strange people who seemed so amazingly at home in this unknown place. Sarah's comments had their old tang, Elsa thought.

But at the edge of the campus she subsided into lifelessness again. Summer school was in session and the girls passed students hurrying between the halls. Sarah clutched at Elsa.

"Now, Elsa, look at that woman! Suppose I had to room with a person like that! She looks so *teachery!* And she must be twenty-five at least. Hope I'll be in better business when I'm twenty-five than going to school."

"She probably is a teacher," responded Elsa cheerfully. "Isn't that what summer school is for? Anyway, Sarah, I'll have to be studying music longer than that."

"Oh, well, that's different," muttered Sarah. "There's something to study in music." Elsa looked at her thoughtfully.

At the principal's office they paused. "I'll have to give him this letter about the scholarship. But

my! I hate to go in." Sarah rapped at the door.

The principal, a florid big man who filled solidly his desk chair, greeted the girls formally. He read the High School principal's letter and gave it to his secretary to file.

"Now you would like to put in your application, I suppose," he made a wide gesture of invitation toward Sarah.

"Oh, no!" Sarah shrank back. "Must I?"

"It is much wiser to apply early." The man's tone disapproved of Sarah's attitude toward registration. "It assures you a place on the campus."

"Oh," said Sarah, grasping the pen feebly.

Name, birthplace, age. Each piece of information as it found its way into black and white seemed to make her future state more final. Then some questions at the end which Sarah privately thought were none of their business.

"What is your reason for wishing to come to Normal School?" The principal poised his pencil waiting for an answer.

"Why, I don'—" Sarah bit the word off. "It's the only thing a girl around here can do," she substituted lamely.

The principal's face looked grim as he wrote the answer.

"Why do you wish to go home every week-end?"

Sarah was sure of herself here. "My father is all alone," she explained. "I want to keep our home for him. Don't you think I can get a school in our district when I am through here?" She watched his face eagerly.

"It is impossible to predict future positions," he said.

Sarah looked discouraged. "Well, I don't know then as I better regis—" Elsa took her arm firmly. "That is all?" she asked the principal courteously.

"Yes, unless you wish to register."

"Oh, no thank you!" Elsa's startled haste from the room made Sarah laugh. "Medicine for someone else is always pleasanter." Her voice sounded bitter.

Elsa turned and looked at her gravely. "Now, see here, Sarah, why don't you study music the way you want to? You don't wish to come here because you don't want to teach."

Sarah met the grave look with tragic eyes. "You know I can't, Elsa. Yes, I know you've asked me to go back with you and study in New York. I'll never forget that." She stopped a moment. "Elsa, you must understand. I'm all Pa's got. I must keep the home open for him. If I go

here, I'll make them give me a school near home and then, there I'll be, fixed forever."

"Exactly," said Elsa, "and forever is a long time." But at Sarah's shudder, she forebore to say any more.

One more outburst in the train, and the matter was not mentioned again. "A nice teacher I'd make with hair this color!" Sarah roused herself into considerable animation. "Once Miss Butts left me in charge of the district school for a couple of hours and when she came back the school yard was filled with mothers come to save their children." Her eyes sparkled. "You never heard such a racket, Elsa!"

Elsa smiled. "Sometimes I think you exaggerate, Sarah. But I don't really believe that you would make a very good teacher."

Sarah sighed. "I don't, either." And then a little later, "Sometimes I don't like being young at all, Elsa. We don't know how to decide things and there's no one to help us."

Elsa's car met them at the station and as they drove through the cool clean air along the edge of the sea, Sarah's spirits revived.

"Yes, I'll come up at eight o'clock sharp," she promised. "Will your father play us the whole

symphony tonight?" She was eager, alert, full of vitality again.

"Yes, the last movement that gave him so much trouble finally satisfies him. He wants our opinion."

"He depends on your judgment a great deal now, doesn't he, Elsa?" Sarah watched her wistfully.

"Yes, I think he will really miss me this winter while he is arranging for its performance in Milan." Elsa smiled maternally. "But it will do him good to get along without me." She paused. "Some day, Sarah, you and I might go abroad together if——"

Sarah flung out her hand. "Oh, *don't*!" she cried.

Elsa shook her head pityingly. "Eight o'clock, then," she said.

It was the first time that the girls had heard the whole symphony. For three weeks Signor Rizzio had been working feverishly on some phrases of the last movement. Now as he finished his brilliant performance, he whirled toward his audience for approval. Sarah, flushed and starry-eyed, could say nothing. But even the most demanding of artists could have asked no more than her response. Elsa, too, was deeply moved, but her

eyes had their clear impersonal look. She was as erect and assured as if she had been at the piano herself.

"It is a gorgeous piece of work, Father. More perfect than I could have dreamed. There is just one phrase here—" she rose and put her finger on the black-dotted manuscript—"right here I think it would be better——"

"You think it would be better! What, may I ask, do you know about it, that you attempt to dictate to me!" The little man turned on Elsa in sudden black fury.

For an instant Sarah's heart turned over. Was she about to witness the destruction of this relation between father and daughter that it had been so difficult to build up? She saw Elsa's pointing finger jerk from the page, and her involuntary backward movement. Her father struck the keys again, flinging out the phrase in triumph.

Instantly the artist in Elsa reasserted itself. She leaned over her father's shoulder and played the phrase with her own slight modification. Signor Rizzio listened, his head bent forward like a hawk. He tried it his way, then Elsa's. Pulling the manuscript from the rack, he scratched at a few of the notes. Then he thrust it back and tried the whole movement again, Elsa standing by his

side watching intently. The two seemed utterly unaware of each other in their absorption in the work.

A quick exchange of Italian which Sarah could not follow, and Elsa came back and sat down beside her. The little man faced them again, his nervous hands on his knees. "Better, is it not?" He gave a quick nod at Sarah. "But you are not a critic like my daughter." He looked from one girl to the other. "She is a genius—" his eyes had a seer-like penetration. "She will go far. You are not a genius like her—" Sarah felt his eyes go through her—"but you have the qualities of success. Beauty, power, great capacity for work. And spirit—I like your spirit!"

Sarah was dumb with embarrassment at these personal remarks. What should one say? She looked helplessly at Elsa.

Elsa nodded agreement. "And she should waste no time getting to work, should she, father? Music will not bear interruptions."

"At once. Nothing should stand in her way."

The little man's dogmatic tone roused Sarah's ire. In a minute the whole sorry story was out. Elsa added a few words about the day's trip. Signor Rizzio's amazement was genuine.

"But you must live your own life," he cried.

"One generation has no right to tie the hands of the next."

"Pa doesn't tie my hands," rejoined Sarah hotly. "He doesn't even know about this chance to go to New York."

"Oh, very well." Signor Rizzio finally dismissed the matter with an irresponsible shrug. "Do as you wish. My Elsa and I part for the winter, do we not? And she will thereby learn independence."

Sarah privately thought that Elsa's independence had been learned at great cost years before. She rose to go, waking Dakin from his nap on the divan.

"If you came to New York"—the man grinned impishly—"then your dog could live in my beautiful kennels on the Hudson."

Sarah was too depressed to answer the thrust. Life was so complex and difficult. And who knew what was right?

As the days went on, her depression did not lift. A catalog came from the Normal School, and Sarah, after one look at the pages of courses, thrust it into her desk drawer. "I'll have to read it through some day, I suppose," she thought wearily. "Got to find out how many sheets and towels to take."

She tried to shake off the feeling of sick foreboding at doing something she was not meant to do. Her mind argued with itself endlessly. She saw herself going on forever teaching school. She woke from dreams, sitting up in bed, her forehead wet with perspiration. "I must do something about it," she would whisper. "I've got to do something about it. But what is there to do?"

With endless precaution, she watched herself that she let no hint of her distress shadow Pa's comfort. "He's having such a nice time this summer," she told Elsa. "The Commissioner is terribly interested in his alfalfa experiments. He got him to try out some of his own schemes, too, in the upper pasture. He comes over real often and they spend just hours up there in the field talking the grass into growing faster. It's fine for Pa. He's been trying these things on a small scale for so long. You see, Elsa," she said significantly, "what a born farmer he is."

One morning when the Commissioner stayed longer than usual, Pa brought him down to the house to dinner. Bobby, who patiently hung on the outskirts whenever the Commissioner appeared, pressed his nose against the kitchen screen door. Sarah flew about the kitchen, excited, eager to make this unexpected dinner a success. She

touched the end of Bobby's nose, pressed into tiny black and white squares. "Now, you run away, Bobby. I'm not going to ask you to stay to dinner. You had your turn. Besides"—she whipped the mashed potatoes into a creamy drift—"he might like a vacation from small boys."

"Small boys yourself!" shouted Bobby. "You're a nice one to talk about small boys. Baby! That's what you are." He backed down the steps. "Baby! I wouldn't stay to your ole dinner!"

Sarah laughed. The excitement and hurry had taken her mind away from the endless debate. She felt like the Sarah of the old days.

The dinner was a great success. Sarah felt Pa's pride and pleasure in her achievement. The Commissioner seemed to approve, too. He ate heartily and Sarah heard him say as he went down the path. "Well, you *have* got a nice home here, Mr. Thurston." She felt rewarded for almost anything.

The next day when the depression came back, she tried to recapture her elation by boasting to Bobby about the dinner, while she washed the dishes. But Bobby's own sore feelings were unsoothed by an account of a dinner which he had missed.

"Think you're awful smart, don't you? Well, you're nothing but a baby!" he sulked.

Sarah fired up. "Now see here, Bobby, you've called me that often enough. What do you mean, baby?"

Bobby glanced toward the door but held his ground. "Well, ain't you?" he jeered. "Can't stay away at school a whole week at a time. Have to come running home over every Sunday."

"A lot you know why I am coming home week-ends." Sarah turned a superior back.

"Well, p'raps I don't." Bobby hated Sarah's superiority. "But if you wouldn't be such a baby, your Pa could go off for the Commissioner the way he wants him to. 'Have to keep the home open for Sarah!' " mimicked Bobby. "That's what your Pa always tells him. Baby!"

Sarah faced Bobby, her dish towel hanging by her side, her eyes boring into him. "What's that he said? Tell me again, Bobby, exactly."

Bobby backed toward the door. "Well, he did. 'I got to keep the home open for my girl. I'm all she's got.' Or something like that. Anyone would think you were a baby—" he stopped at Sarah's hysterical laughter. "What's so funny?"

Sarah mopped her eyes with the dry end of

the dish towel, "Nothing—little boys—would understand—Bobby," she gasped.

Bobby banged out of the door.

Sarah ran after him. "What did the Commissioner want him to do? Hi, Bobby! What did he want of Pa!"

Bobby did not turn his head. "Better ask him and find out," he shouted.

"All right, I will," thought Sarah. "It's about time somebody found out something."

She finished her work and went straight home to the upper pasture where Pa was usually to be found. She sat down on a stone at the edge of the alfalfa field and watched him for a while. Pa finished his examination of some of the long grass heads and then sauntered over and sat down beside Sarah. "Pretty good-looking patch of grass, eh, Sarah?" his eyes following the softly waving green lines.

"Fine," said Sarah. "Say, Pa, what if I shouldn't come home every week-end next year?"

Pa gave her a quick glance. "Why, just as you wish, Sarah. You might miss some good times there if you were off so much. Perhaps it would be better if you didn't come home every week-end."

Sarah bit off a grass stem. "And what if I don't come home *any* week ends?"

Pa turned and stared at her. "What you talking about, Sarah?"

Sarah chewed meditatively at the stem. "You know, Pa, I don't want to be a teacher. And I guess nobody else would want me to be one, once I tried it."

Pa looked worried. "I know, Sarah," he said gently. "I'd like to have you study music the way you want. But I don't know just where I'd get the money."

"He knew all the time how I felt," thought Sarah remorsefully. But even remorse could not stop this clear stream of happiness that seemed to be washing away all the unhappiness of the past weeks. Sarah had never felt like this; as if she had come out of a dark cave into sunshine; as if she had been sick and was now well.

"Elsa wants me to spend the winter and study with her in New York." She unrolled the news as if it were a bright ribbon. "Her father has to be in Milan about his symphony and he offered me a salary to be a companion to Elsa. No—" she answered Pa's quick gesture—"of course I wouldn't take that, but don't you think it would be all right to take lessons instead? He said he

didn't care, and you just ought to hear what he pays a woman to be with Elsa when he is off. Elsa'd lots rather have me."

Pa looked dazed. He pulled some grass heads back and forth through his fingers. "Well," he said finally, "it sounds pretty good to me. Of course I'll have to talk it over with them." Then a little sheepishly, "If you were off, Sarah, I think I might consider an offer the Commissioner made me."

"Tell me about it, Pa," Sarah led him on.

In great detail Pa described his own projects and those of the Commissioner. If Sarah's attention wavered, it was because of the sudden rushes of happiness which drove out all thought. But she gathered enough to know that Pa would be at the capitol all winter working as practical farmer with a group of young agriculturists who in the spring would start on a tour of education for the farmers of their countryside. "Then," finished Pa, "I'll come back and plant my own land. And perhaps by that time you'll be ready for a little Maine air."

"Oh, Pa, I will, I will! I don't know how I'm going to get along without it." Both of them knew what Maine air stood for.

"Can't always go on doing the same thing,"

said Pa philosophically. "We'll have quite a lot to talk about when we get together in the spring. Sure you'll want to come back?"

"I'd have to anyway." Sarah grinned at him. "Signor Rizzio has bought Shore House and plans to spend a long season there. Elsa says he gave her the deed, but she laughed and says it's only a gesture, that he still thinks a man owns his daughter. She's so sort of tolerant of him now. Isn't it nice, Pa?" A long pause. Then Sarah, briskly, "Well, I'll go right down to the house and write a letter to the Normal School principal withdrawing my application. And this afternoon I'll run over and tell Bertha Smithers that she has the sweeping scholarship now. She'll be glad. And I know she'll like it up there, Pa." Sarah grew enthusiastic. "It's such a pretty place and the buildings are so nice." Then she laughed at herself. "Nicer than they were, anyway!"

Pa chuckled his understanding.

"Now I'm going to pick some raspberries and make Bobby a big raspberry tart." She was full of energy.

"Well!" said Pa. "How about me? What's Bobby get a tart for?"

Row! Row! Row! Dakin had discovered the

pair and was takjng a short cut straight through the alfalfa to them.

"Hi, you! Get out of my grass!" Pa sat up as Dakin flung himself against them, panting hot breaths of ecstasy into their faces.

"Say, what about Dakin?" Pa sounded horror-struck.

"Oh, that's all right." Sarah laughed. Laughter came easily today. "He'll go with me and live in Signor Rizzio's beautiful kennels up the Hudson. I might have known that man would get his own way. Suppose Dakin will get to be his dog, Pa?"

Pa looked at the big collie lying across Sarah's lap in complete contentment. "No," he said, "he'll always be Sarah's Dakin."

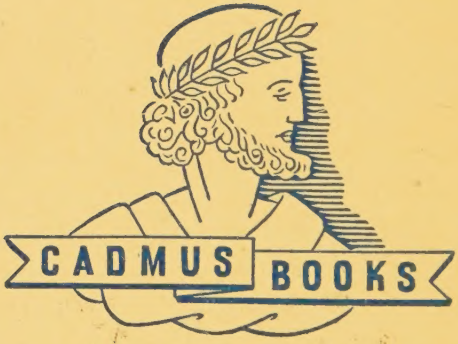
SARAH AND HER DOG DAKIN

This story about a dog—the sort of dog *you* would like to own—is laid in Seal Harbor, Maine. As you can easily guess, the town got its name from the many seals that lived in the harbor. Naturally, as you read the story, you will learn quite a lot about seals—and about dogs, too. When you want to look up some of these things again, you can use this index.

Animals:
- dog, 3-8; accident, 32-37, 46; chasing seals, 51-56, 63-65; digging flower beds, 69-70; illness, 73-79; herding pigs, 122-127; singing, 166, 172-173; chasing a ghost, 189-190
- Dog Show at the Fair, 16, 18-22
- pigs, 23, 117-124, 130, 131
- seals, 46-49, 50, 51

Music, 102, 103, 140, 154, 160, 166-170, 213, 216-217, 219-221

Other interesting dog stories are *Trueboy, Valiant,* and *Valor.*


CADMUS BOOKS

PROPERTY OF
Manfred Public School,
MANFRED, NO. DAK.
Vol. No. ----------